

A World of Difference

Prologue

Number 4 Privet Drive. It was a dull place, really, an entirely normal house in an entirely normal neighborhood that prided itself on being absolutely, mind-bogglingly normal. Except that the residents there, the Dursley family, had a great and terrible secret. Petunia Dursley's sister was a witch, a powerful one at that, and had died with her husband – a wizard – a few years ago, leaving their son, Harry James Potter, on their doorstep.

Petunia had no doubts that young Harry was magical, as opposed to her darling son, Dudley. How could he not be, with a wizard and a witch for parents? This belief was only proven when the boy levitated one of her Dudley's toys out of his crib to play with. She and her husband, Vernon, hated magic, loathed it with a passion unmatched by any other. They thought it was freakish and unnatural, and as a result, treated Harry as something inhuman.

It was July 30th, four years after Lily and James Potter had been killed. Harry was in his cupboard, silently counting down the time until his birthday using the watch he had found on the ground one day.

Knowing that he wouldn't have a cake or ice cream like his cousin Dudley did every birthday, or even any presents, Harry had used his fingers to draw one in the dust that had settled by his door, complete with five candles. *Only a few minutes more*, Harry thought to himself excitedly. *And then I'll be old enough to go to school!*

Harry had found out about school by overhearing his Aunt Petunia talk to his obese cousin Dudley, explaining that the year that children turned five years old, they were to go to first grade, where they would meet new people and make friends and learn. The prospect of actually leaving the house to actually *learn* and make friends sustained Harry when he received his beatings, gave him determination and strong will to succeed.

The watch beeped, marking a new hour, and Harry smiled; he was five years old! He was so happy that he wanted to do something, hug something, but there was nothing he could do. He was locked in his

cupboard, with nothing but a bedroll and a few spiders. He gently scooped one up with his palm and brought it close to his face.

“I’m five years old now!” he whispered quietly, in full childish innocence. Spiders didn’t scare him; they were in fact his only companions here in the cupboard. “D’ya think Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon will let me go to school?”

The spider made no response of course, but moved across Harry’s small hand slowly. Harry put it down as gently as he could, and pulled up the covers to his bedroll, falling asleep with a smile on his face.

The next morning, Harry woke up cheerfully as his Aunt Petunia unlocked his cupboard. He’d had a wonderful dream that he was going to a nameless school where he made friends quickly and was able to play with them. He hoped the dream was close to real life.

As he was making eggs and bacon for his relatives, Harry tried to pluck up the nerve to ask his Aunt Petunia the question he desperately wanted answered. He had learned long ago that questions from him were not tolerated, but surely the answer was worth the usual punishment of a beating, especially if it was an affirmative.

On the other hand, if he asked in the middle of the meal, then it was likely that the food would be taken away from him, so Harry decided to wait until after breakfast. Beatings from Uncle Vernon were much worse than from Aunt Petunia, so he also waited until his uncle had left for work.

After Vernon left in his car, Harry turned to his aunt meekly. “Aunt Petunia?”

“What is it, boy?”

Harry was exceedingly nervous. “I’m five years old now...”

“What? You want a present, boy? Too bad!”

Harry shook his head. "No, I don't want a present. Or cake or anything else," he asserted firmly. "Am I going to go to school this year?"

Petunia's eyes narrowed. "Who told you about school?"

Harry was about to panic and began stuttering. "I, I heard you talking to Dudley one day w-w-while I was c-cleaning. Y-y-you said that when b-boys t-turn f-f-f-five, they g-go to school in fall."

Petunia frowned, remembering the one time Dudley had asked about primary school. *How dare Potter listen in on us?! That little freak will get what's coming to him!* "Absolutely not!" she said with a sneer. "School is for proper boys, you little freak!"

All of Harry's hopes were shattered in an instant as the words echoed in his ears. He burst into tears and ran out the door as fast as his scrawny legs could carry him, not hearing Petunia yelling at him not to leave the house. Harry ran all the way to the park where he sat underneath the slide, hugging his knees to his chest as he rocked back and forth, sobbing.

He wished with all his heart to be in a place where he could be accepted, where he wasn't hated instantly. Unknown to Harry, that day a solar eclipse was predicted for early in the morning, and as he made his wish, the moon fully eclipsed the sun. Furthermore, Harry did not know that solar eclipses were the most powerful events that influenced magic and made the impossible possible.

Harry felt something deep and powerful surge within him, tugging at his very soul, causing an inordinate amount of pain. Unable to stand it, Harry blacked out.

Chapter One: A Whole New World

Harry woke up in a nearly completely white room that had some metal instruments on a nearby tray, and some electronics beeping to his left. Sitting up and looking around, he found someone dressed in white walking towards him. Harry guessed that the man was a doctor.

"Hello, how are you feeling?" the doctor asked kindly.

Harry was on his guard instantly. "OK..." he said slowly. "Why?"

"You just suddenly appeared unconscious here in the Hospital Wing," the doctor explained. "My name is Doctor Kadowaki." He waited for a moment, but when Harry did not respond, he smiled at him. "What's your name?"

Harry thought for a moment. "I don't have one."

"That can't be right," the doctor said with a smile. "Surely your parents gave you one?"

Harry looked down. "I think they did, but they died in a car crash when I was a baby."

An orphan, Kadowaki noted. "I'm sorry to hear that. Do you have any relatives you stay with?"

Harry nodded and quietly said, "Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia."

"Then surely they told you your name," Kadowaki coaxed.

"No, they always called me boy."

Kadowaki was beginning to get worried at this point. *Has he been abused?* "Could you tell me a bit about your home life?" Harry looked at him confusedly, and Kadowaki elaborated. "I mean, tell me what an average day is like for you."

"Oh. Aunt Petunia wakes me up and lets me out of the cupboard so I can make breakfast for my family. Then I clean the kitchen and dining room. If I don't do it quick, Uncle Vernon punishes me. After that I

clean the house while Aunt Petunia tells me what to do. If I accidentally break or spill something I'm sent to my cupboard. Sometimes I make dinner. After dinner, I'm sent to my cupboard anyway."

Kadowaki was beginning to get angry for this young, mistreated boy. He didn't look any older than four years old! He didn't let it show, though. "How old are you?"

"Five."

Add malnutrition to the list... I need to speak to Headmaster Cid. "Do you know how to read?"

Harry nodded slowly. "I learned when I needed to read the recipes for dinner. I taught myself."

"I need to go talk to someone right now," Kadowaki explained. "Would you like to read a book?"

Harry's eyes widened. "You trust me that much?"

Kadowaki nodded. "What would you like?"

Harry lay back and thought for a few seconds. "Could I have something about the world? About stuff that happened before I got here?" Harry asked tentatively, searching for a word that he'd heard before.

"You mean a history book?" Kadowaki asked gently.

Harry's eyes brightened. "That's the word! May I read a history book? I've always wanted to learn about what happens outside of Privet Drive."

Kadowaki blinked. *Privet Drive? Haven't heard of a town or street called that...* Nevertheless, he went to his bookshelf and pulled out *The Full History of Terra*, giving it to the eager boy, who opened it quickly and began to read avidly.

While Harry was occupied, Kadowaki discretely cast Scan and read the readout.

Harry James Potter (The Boy-Who-Lived)

Coming from a different dimension, Harry Potter is famous amongst the magical world for having survived the unstoppable Killing Curse and defeating the Dark Lord Voldemort on Halloween at the age of one year, three months, by reflecting it back at the caster. The only mark of this encounter is the lightning scar on his forehead, a magical link between him and Voldemort.

Harry Potter is in possession of his own magical core, which replenishes with food and rest. He does not need a Guardian Force to draw, cast or junction magic.

Special Abilities:

Untrained Metamorphmagus – able to, with training, change his appearances at will

Untrained Parselmouth – at this point, able to speak to snakes in their own tongue; eventually able to speak the snake language fluently

Untrained Animagus – able to, with training, turn into an animal that represents his personality and spirit at will

Threat Level: 2

Kadowaki's eyes widened as he read the incredible description. "I-I'll be right back..." With that, he ran out of the Hospital Wing to the elevator and punched in the third floor.

Headmaster Cid was about to finish a card game when Kadowaki rushed in. He played down the final card, winning and taking the challenger's T-Rexaur Card. "What is it, Doctor?"

"We've a situation. You know that boy who appeared out of nowhere?"

Cid nodded. "Of course. How's his condition?"

“He’s alright now. Still showing some effects of malnutrition, but I’ll have that fixed up soon,” Kadowaki admitted. “From what he’s told me, he lives with an abusive family. He’s only five years old. He didn’t even know his name since they never called him by it.”

Cid scowled; he couldn’t stand families that abused children under their care. The children were the future of the world! “I see. Is there anything else?”

“I cast Scan on him to find his name,” Kadowaki went on, “and I found it. His name is Harry James Potter.”

Cid’s face turned to one of interest. “What else did Scan tell you?”

Kadowaki shook his head. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you, sir. You should do it yourself.”

Cid raised an eyebrow. “Try me.”

Kadowaki took a deep breath. “He’s from a different dimension, where as a one-year-old, he defeated a very powerful Dark Lord and became instantly famous. I think a Dark Lord is like a Sorceress. Anyway, he did it by reflecting something called a Killing Curse, and he has his own magical core, allowing him to draw, cast and junction magic without a GF. On top of that, if he’s trained, he’ll be able to change his appearance at will, turn into an animal at will, and speak the snake language.”

Cid’s jaw dropped in shock. *We have a dimension-traveler? An abused boy?* “That’s, that’s incredible!”

“What should I do, sir?”

Cid leaned back and rubbed his chin pensively. “Well, he traveled to our dimension for a reason. Perhaps it was to get away from his family? Anyway, we have a duty to help him if he wants to return. Let’s go find out what he desires.”

A few minutes later, Cid and Kadowaki entered the Hospital Wing to see Harry immersed in the history book, reading quickly if his constantly scanning eyes were anything to go by.

“Harry?” Kadowaki asked softly, getting no response from the boy. He moved slowly, not wanting to scare his patient. Then he put his hand on the boy’s head, mussing his hair to get the boy’s attention. Harry looked up, predictably, and put down the book. “I found your name. It’s Harry, Harry James Potter.”

“Harry James Potter,” Harry said slowly, testing it out. Then he smiled. “Yeah, that sounds right. Thank you!”

Kadowaki smiled genuinely. “Harry, this is Headmaster Cid. He wants to talk to you.”

“Hello Mr. Cid,” Harry greeted politely.

“Hello Harry,” Cid replied. “I have a few questions for you, if you can answer them for me?”

“I’ll do my best.”

“I’m sure you will. Do you know about magic?”

Harry frowned. “Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia told me there’s no such thing as magic. They beat me whenever I even said the word.”

Cid shared a look with Kadowaki before turning back to Harry. “That’s not true. Magic is as real as you and I.” Harry, wise beyond his years, looked at him skeptically. “Watch. Blizzard!”

An icy cold jet of blue-white sprayed from Cid’s hands onto the tray with the medical instruments, freezing it. Kadowaki sighed. “Must you do that every time you need to demonstrate magic? Fire!”

A jet of flames erupted from the doctor’s hand and enveloped the frozen tray, melting the ice quickly. Cid and Kadowaki turned to Harry, whose eyes were wider than saucers.

“Can you teach me to do that?” Harry asked eagerly.

“Maybe when you’re older,” Cid responded with an indulgent smile. “As I was saying, magic’s real. You came from a different dimension.”

“Di-men-sion?” Harry asked slowly, trying to pronounce it correctly. “What’s that?”

Cid thought for a moment. “You came from a different world,” he said finally. “A place far away from here.”

“By magic?” Harry jumped in, making the connection.

Cid laughed. “Yes, by magic. Do you know where you are?” Harry shook his head. “We’re in Balamb Garden.”

Harry’s eyes widened again. “I’m at the Battle School, the Balamb SeeD base?”

Kadowaki blinked, surprised at Harry’s knowledge. Looking at the large history book, he noticed that Harry was quite a ways into it. *He must really like to learn.*

Cid nodded, noting the same thing Kadowaki did. “Now, because you came from a different world, we need to know if you wanted to go back.”

Harry jumped from the bed and hugged Cid around the legs. “Don’t make me go back! Aunt Petunia doesn’t want me to go to school, but I wanna! I wanna go to school!”

“Are you sure?” Cid asked. “It’ll be a lot of hard work.”

“I don’t care!”

“Why do you want to go to school so badly?” Kadowaki asked curiously.

“I wanna make friends and learn everything I can!” Harry said excitedly. “I wanna learn how to defend myself and my friends!”

A solitary tear trailed down from Cid’s right eye, having been involuntarily shed due to the heartfelt speech made by this young boy. “Then welcome to the SeeD academy.”

The next day, Cid walked Harry around the complex, showing him where everything was and arranging for Harry to be given his own quarters. "Over there is the training area," Cid was saying. "Don't go in there until I tell you; the monsters in there are very dangerous."

Harry nodded solemnly, knowing already that Cid was being completely serious. "What about the library?" he asked, pointing at another sign. "Can I go in there?"

"Sure," Cid said with a smile. "See the sign over there?"

Harry squinted through his new glasses; Kadowaki had diagnosed him with a bad case of nearsightedness and prescribed him a pair of glasses, not trusting him yet with contacts. "Yeah... does it say 'Kitchens?'?"

"Yes, it does. Well done!" Cid complimented. "Those glasses work well, don't they?"

Harry nodded profusely. "Everything is so much easier to see!" he murmured in wonder. "Wish I had a pair of these back at the Dursley's..."

Quick to change the subject, Cid smiled at Harry. "You'll start going to school tomorrow. You'll be learning reading and writing, math and science, and history."

"Will there be kids my age?" Harry asked, looking around. "Everyone around here looks like an adult."

Cid was a bit surprised at Harry's observations, but then, he'd probably had to develop them quickly to avoid beatings. "Yes, there'll be children your age, because you're going to school in Balamb, just down the road. After you get back every day, I'll have a tutor for you."

"Really?" Harry asked in amazement. This sounded like a dream come true. "What'll he teach me?"

"The weapon of your choice, how to draw and cast magic, and he'll try to help you with your special abilities."

“Special abilities?” Harry exclaimed. “What can I do?”

“He’ll tell you eventually,” Cid said mischievously. “I don’t want to spoil his fun at seeing your face when he tells you.”

“Awww, please?” Harry pulled out the big guns: the dreaded puppy-dog face. Somehow, though, Cid managed to resist.

“Sorry, you have to wait.” *Jeez, he’s going to be a heartbreaker someday.*

Harry was a little disappointed that Cid wouldn’t tell him, but it didn’t hamper his spirits for long. *People are actually treating me nicely! And I can visit the library, and I’m going to school!* He almost didn’t hear Cid’s next words.

“Well, I have some paperwork I have to do. Why don’t you look around, and remember to go visit the Kitchens for dinner when you get hungry? Beware of the line, though. It’s always really long for the hot dogs,” Cid advised.

Harry grinned and took off at a speed wholly unexpected from the scrawny, underfed kid. If Cid didn’t know any better, he’d have said that Harry had equipped some magic to his legs. Harry had gone into the library and looked around on some shelves before pulling out a copy of the same history book that Kadowaki had lent him the previous day. He sat back in the comfortable chair and began to read.

Harry was so engrossed with his book that he didn’t notice the teenagers who entered looking at him funny or the dinner bell. It was only when his stomach growled that Harry reluctantly put the book back and went to the kitchens. There were still several people there, but they were finishing their dinner.

Harry got in the short line and when it was his turn, asked for a hamburger and a salad, which he wolfed down as quick as he could before turning and running off back to the library and returning to the history book. He was entranced by the story of the Sorceresses and how it was SeeD’s job to counter them, even above the jobs they took.

The library was where the trainer found Harry still reading. "Ahem," he said, getting Harry's attention. Harry set down the book on the table neatly and looked at the man confusedly.

"Who're you?"

"I'm your tutor," the man said genially. "My name's Shugui."

Harry looked him over. Shugui was fairly short, about five foot six inches by Harry's reckoning, with cropped hair and a few wide scars on his face, including one particularly nasty-looking one across the cheek. He was thickly built, though, with huge muscles and appeared incredibly dangerous if the multitude of weapons around his waist was anything to go by. He had everything from swords to battle-axes to throwing stars. Harry could feel a quiet confidence emanating from Shugui, and he liked it.

"Harry Potter," Harry responded. "Nice to meet you."

"I'm a weapons specialist, as you may have noticed," Shugui said, indicating his waist with amusement. "See anything you like?"

Harry shrugged. "Sometimes things aren't as they look like," he said cautiously, thinking over his words as he said them. "I'd rather keep my thoughts to myself about the weapons until I know more about them."

Smart kid, Shugui thought to himself, discretely looking Harry over. "You're a pretty thin kid. We need to build up those muscles of yours, so the first part of my training's going to be purely physical. Let me set the rules down: my word is law where you're concerned. Only Headmaster Cid can counter them, and I sure as hell know he's not going to do that. You are to do what I tell you, when I tell you. But if you're confused about something, feel free to ask. I'd rather you ask and learn how to do it the right way than develop a bad habit. Understand?" Harry nodded determinedly. "Good. When you're developed to my satisfaction, then you'll choose a weapon you want to learn and we'll go from there. After you've got a weapon down, I'll teach you how to draw, cast and junction magic."

Harry nodded again, glad that someone was actually helping him when he asked. Then he realized a potential problem. "When will I do homework for school?"

"I'll be training you right after school, so you'll have all the time after dinner."

Harry nodded once more. "When do we start?"

Shugui gave a feral grin. "Now. Give me twenty push-ups!"

By the time Shugui was done with Harry that night, he was a very sore, very tired five-year-old. But when Harry woke up the next morning, he felt refreshed, not sore at all, as if he'd healed completely overnight. He suspected that Shugui had used a Cure spell on him.

Harry got up, showered and dressed before going to the kitchens for some breakfast. He had some toast and a banana, and then walked quickly to the front gate, where Shugui was waiting for him. Seeing Harry's surprised face, Shugui laughed. "Did you honestly think that training's only going to be at night? No, Harry, you'll be trained all the time except for while you're doing your homework."

"Did you use a Cure spell on me when I was sleeping?" Harry asked. "Because I felt completely refreshed when I woke up this morning."

Shugui looked surprised. "As a matter of fact, no I didn't. You're probably just a quick healer."

Harry felt that there was something more to it, but let it go. "So, what now?"

"Well, we have a little more than an hour to get to the school," Shugui said, "so we're going to run, work on your cardiovascular system and legs. So get moving! If you slow down, I'll start using Fire spells!"

Harry gulped and began running. His heart pounding hard, Harry could hear Shugui not far behind him. Risking a glance over his shoulder, Harry's eyebrow twitched to see Shugui casually jogging. *Aw, Harry thought, I need a lot of work on this.*

After a few minutes, Harry was glad that he'd gotten good practice running while avoiding his obese cousin Dudley. Adrenaline was an old friend of Harry's, and he used it to keep going, not wanting a Fire spell aimed at him despite his muscles' increasing reluctance to move.

Shugui was appraising Harry's run as they went, and was mildly surprised to see the boy still running at about the same speed as he started out, despite the sweat he could easily see dripping from Harry's face. *Mind over matter, eh?*

Finally, though, Harry collapsed, having completely exhausted everything he had and then some. Breathing hard, he saw Shugui walk over to him and offer a canteen of water, which Harry took and drank greedily, wetting his parched throat.

"Pretty good for your first run," Shugui praised. "Looks like you made it about half of a mile. Not bad at all." Harry gave his teacher a weak smile, pleased to have done well. "It's another three miles to Balamb, but we'll walk the rest of the way."

"Um, Shugui?" Harry asked quietly, giving back the canteen. "Won't the teacher not like it if I go in there all sweaty?"

"Good point. Water!" A second later, Harry was completely drenched in water, sputtering while Shugui chuckled. "It's hot enough out here that you'll dry off before we get there."

Harry cursed quietly. All he wanted to do was lie down and go to sleep at that moment, but nevertheless, he got up and began walking, eagerly awaiting a chance to sit down and learn. They finally got to class early, and Shugui introduced Harry to the teacher, who was very kind and understanding in Harry's opinion.

Class was very exciting for Harry, as he got acquainted with his new classmates and learned how to use the computers in their desks. His physical soreness was completely forgotten in the midst of living his dream.

A few months passed quickly as Harry grew stronger both mentally and physically. The teacher held Harry as a prodigy, as the young boy appeared to assimilate information quickly and efficiently. During

Harry's free time after finishing his homework, he was often working on the next chapters, going completely ahead of his class.

Shugui was growing increasingly impressed with Harry's resilience and determination. In the last three short months, Harry had completely overcome the effects of malnutrition and had built up some muscle. He didn't look like a child body-builder, but he was slim, lean and fit, and Shugui would tell anyone who would listen how strong Harry was growing. Taking advantage of this, Shugui used some of his funds to buy Harry some clothes enchanted with Gravija to train him in weights.

It was time, Shugui decided, for Harry to learn his first and primary weapon. "So, what're you interested in?" he asked, leading Harry into his weapon stores.

Harry frowned pensively, looking around until a certain weapon caught his eye. Following his gaze, Shugui picked up the weapon. "This is a gunblade, a kind of combination sword and gun. See the trigger here? It causes the end of the blade to explode into flames."

Harry smiled. "Can you teach me how to use that?"

Shugui nodded. "We'll start tomorrow. Remember, though, that we're still going to be doing our normal training on top of this."

"Of course," Harry agreed. "Wouldn't want to get out of shape."

By the following April, Harry was proficient in using the gunblade, and Shugui told him that the only way to get better now was through experience. To Harry's immense frustration, he hadn't grown noticeably taller than when he had arrived on Terra, and as a result he'd had to custom order a gunblade for his size.

His lack of physical size was offset, however, by the fact that Harry was working on third grade level work already, his teacher having been fully cooperative and giving him harder and harder work. His teacher wanted Harry to skip a few grades, but Harry refused. He wanted to stay close to his friends, especially Zell and Squall, each of whom planned on joining SeeD.

Squall was a quiet perfectionist who preferred to fade into the background and followed the rules, but was again and again brought into the forefront in his confrontations with Seifer Almasy, a bully from two grades up. Neither could truly stand each other, though they shared some common interests, one in particular: the gunblade.

Zell, on the other hand, was a hyperactive kid who had almost instantly made friends with Harry. Overly enthusiastic, Zell was not one for homework, and as such, his grades slipped. On the other hand, Zell was the best there was in terms of boxing, as his grandfather was a very strong SeeD who specialized in using nothing but his fists and GFs. Amazingly, Zell was a fast healer, recovering from bruises in a couple of hours.

Harry was essentially the glue between those two, having brought them together into a triad of friends. Under Squall's influence, Zell quieted down enough not to get in trouble so often, and under Zell's influence, Squall opened up a bit and was a bit more expressive with his emotions and concerns.

Harry himself had progressed to an astounding point, having just finished third grade work by the end of the school year. His vocabulary was immense as well, due to all the reading Harry had been doing with the handy dictionary at his side.

When first grade let out for summer, Harry's training was taken to the next level; Shugui had decided to teach him to draw and cast magic. But in order to do so, Harry needed to calm his mind and learn how to sense around him. It took him quite a while – a whole month, in fact – but Harry finally managed it. And, having read up on the potential dangers of using Guardian Forces – namely the danger of losing memories – Harry bounced a few ideas off of Shugui.

"What if I organize my memories and put a big ole' wall around them, so the GFs can't reach them?"

"That's a fine idea, but then where would the GFs go? The memory banks are usually where they reside."

"I'd compress my memories like they do for computers, so I could access them, but there'd still be room."

Shugui looked at Harry proudly. "I don't know why no one ever thought of that before. Go ahead and try it!"

Harry spent another month building up his walls, and was pleased to find that it got easier each time he worked on them. His memory was improving as well. The walls were even up when he wasn't paying attention to them, which was essential if his plan was to work.

Then he started practicing how to sense magic in areas around him while walking. He found a few draw points around Balamb Garden, to his surprise, consisting of Fire, Cure and Esuna. Harry also discovered that no matter when he thought about it, he always knew how many of each spell he had.

It was at this point that Shugui took Harry outside to train against the monsters there off the road. They were a little challenging for young Harry, but Harry had gotten very fast, even with his weighted clothes. He used his gunblade skills to kill all but one of his enemies and then avoided the last one's attacks while he drew as many spells he could from it.

Shugui explained that for some unknown reason, every time someone killed a monster, they gained part of their strength. "Most call it experience, with good reason. Getting large amounts give you a healthy amount of experience to draw from." Harry felt himself getting even stronger.

There was one thing confusing Harry, however. His spells were practically multiplying by themselves. Once, he'd double-checked his Blizzard spells and found that he had enough for twenty uses. A week later, he'd checked it again and saw that he had enough for 27 uses. *Where did I get the increase? I've been too busy to draw lately!*

He confessed his discovery to Shugui, who appeared stumped. "Don't question a good thing."

Harry, suspicious, used Scan on himself and was astonished at the readout. "Boy-Who-Lived? What the hell? I know I came from a different dimension, but this is just effing ridiculous! Though those special abilities look pretty cool. Hmm. I have my own magic core? Maybe that's multiplying the spells I have."

Shugui appeared a little jealous, but quickly crushed it. *The student was always destined to surpass the teacher*, he reminded himself. "I suppose I should teach you how to junction your magic now." Harry sat in the Lotus position, paying avid attention. "Most of us use GFs to do it for us, but as you read, you don't need them for it. Since I have no idea how they do it, I'll let you borrow my GF, Quetzalcoatl." He put up a face of concentration, and out of his hand appeared a yellow jewel, probably a topaz. "To junction him, just take the jewel and focus on absorbing it."

Harry nodded, taking the jewel from his teacher and doing as ordered. The jewel flashed and Harry felt his mind suddenly fill up with new presence. *Quetzalcoatl?*

:Yes, it is I. This is an interesting structure to protect your memories, I admit. Well thought out. Now your memories are safe. :

Thank you. Would you please teach me how to junction my spells?

:Why? You will have another Guardian Force soon enough.:

I Scanned myself a minute ago, and it said I could do it without a GF. I'd like to learn, just in case.

:Very well. I shall junction your Cure spell to your health. Pay close attention. :

Harry kept his focus on Quetzalcoatl, trying to be sure to catch the process. He felt Quetzalcoatl take the portion of his magic that he recognized as his stock of Cures and created a magical tie from them to his heart.

:Each system of your body can have one magic junctioned to it: Quetzalcoatl explained. :You have your muscular system, your skeletal system, your immune system and your cardiovascular system, which now has Cure attached. You can also equip magic to your spirit to increase your resilience to certain types of magic. For instance, equipping Thunder to your elemental resistance portion of your spirit, you take less damage from lightning-type attacks. By equipping Thunder to your elemental attack portion, you give your attacks a partial thunder element. Your spirit also has status effect

portions, resistance and attack. Your muscular system has two subsystems you can equip magic to: your strength and speed.:

I see. Is there anything else?

:Merely remember not to use status magic for your elemental potions of your spirit; it won't do anything. And the reverse applies as well.:

Thank you.

:You are welcome.:

Harry unjunctioned Quetzalcoatl, and handed the topaz back to Shugui, who promptly absorbed it again. "I've got it."

"Good," Shugui said, pleased. "But considering that you're not even in the SeeD years yet, don't junction any of your magic. You'll get better results from your training."

"Understood."

"How many spells do you have currently, by the way?"

Harry thought for a moment, gauging his stock. "I have 80 Cures, 43 Thunders, 92 Fires, 74 Blizzards, 30 Esuna, and 89 Scans."

"Very good. Be sure to draw magic from around you anytime you come across it, especially new ones you don't have yet," Shugui advised. "But if you come across Ultima or Holy, be careful. Those magics can rip your body apart if you're not prepared."

"Understood."

Shugui nodded. "Now, it is time to develop your special abilities."

"Metamorphmagus, Parseltongue, Animagus," Harry listed off. "Metamorphmagus seems to be the most useful at the moment."

"Being able to change your appearances would be a great asset," Shugui agreed. "If you go into SeeD, that ability would almost certainly guarantee you undercover jobs."

"In the meantime, though, I'll settle for looking my age," Harry said with a hint of frustration at his lack of growth. "How do I start?"

"Remember that the Scan told us that it's based on willpower," Shugui reminded him. "So, I'd say that you need to focus really hard on the changes you want. I'd start with something simple first and then work your way up."

"How about changing my eye color?" Harry suggested, trying to think of something small.

"Sounds good. Try it out."

Harry closed his eyes and imagined his eyes as they were: a vivid emerald green. Then he concentrated on the green changing into sky blue. Harry felt his magic reach up to his eyes and touch them, creating a tingling sensation for a few seconds. Keeping hold of that sensation, Harry opened his eyes. "How are they?"

"A light blue," Shugui said, leaning in to inspect them. "Well done. Is it difficult?"

"A little," Harry admitted. "I have to keep my focus on the tendril of magic. I can sense that if I let it go, my eyes will return to normal."

"Then it's good that we're starting small," Shugui said with a smile. "Keep it up as long as you can while we're training. What about the snake-speak?"

Harry shrugged. "According to the Scan, I need to be face-to-face with a snake-like creature."

"And Animagus?"

Harry frowned. "I don't think I should work on that one for a while, until I master my Metamorphmagus abilities. There could be any number of ways to screw up badly. And how am I supposed to know which animal represents me?"

"Fair enough. Now, let's get back to training. You'll spar against me."

Harry knew this would be difficult since he also had to keep up the eye transformation, but obediently went to the wall and pulled out a wooden gunblade. He bent his knees slightly and held his weapon with both hands for greater stability and support, angling the gunblade across his body for defense.

Shugui nodded. "Begin!"

Harry was right; the fight was much more difficult since he couldn't keep his full attention on the fight. As a result, he was a little slower in his blocks and parries, which proved costly against the much more experienced warrior. After a few minutes, Harry had been bruised several times, so Harry jumped backwards and summoned one of his spells. "Cure!"

The wounds quickly closed and Harry felt a rush of energy, which he promptly injected into his rush back against Shugui. He slammed his gunblade against Shugui's, hoping to distract him enough to pull off his next move. Harry then ducked down, pulling the gunblade away from Shugui's, and swept his foot at his opponents' feet, trying to trip him and end it quickly.

Shugui, however, was more experienced and faster, and easily dodged the move by flipping over Harry's head. Before Harry could recover, Shugui had his own wooden practice gunblade against Harry's throat.

Knowing that he'd been beat, Harry yielded. "That was a good match," Shugui complimented him, "considering that your attention was necessarily divided. Are your eyes still the same color?" Harry looked at Shugui, who nodded "Good, you kept it up. That was a nice try with the sweep move; that would have finished many others."

Harry merely nodded, though he was innately pleased. Shugui never sugarcoated things, so Harry knew that he was being completely serious. The dinner bell rang, then, and Harry heard a rush for the kitchen. "See you tomorrow, Instructor Shugui!" he said quickly before running off, hoping to get in line for the hot dogs before it got too long.

As it was, Harry just managed to get one of the hot dogs before they were out. After eating, Harry went back to his quarters and practiced his new skill in front of the mirror. He changed his eye color again to a dull brown, then decided to make things interesting by making one eye light blue again while keeping the other brown. He mostly succeeded, but each eye had speckles of the other color.

Keeping up that transformation was difficult at first, but it slowly got easier. When he felt comfortable with that, he added in a different hair color, changing it from the natural raven color to dirty blond. After several minutes of maintaining that while reading a fictional book, Harry also lengthened his now blonde hair from the stubborn two inches to shoulder length. This had the added benefit of fixing his natural messiness, Harry noted.

No one would recognize me now! Not even Instructor Shugui! Harry thought before giggling, which distracted him enough that he lost hold on the transforming magic, returning to his normal self. "Damn it!" Harry cursed. "Let's try that again."

A minute later, Harry transformed back into the longhaired blond with one blue, one brown eye. Returning to his reading, he was careful to keep at least part of his focus on maintaining his transformation. When he finished the book a few hours later, Harry looked back in the mirror and saw that his hair was very slowly shortening again, and darkening into black. His eyes had green speckles in them as well. With a frown of concentration, Harry reinforced his disguise.

With that, Harry did some stretching exercises and thirty push-ups and sit-ups before hopping into bed. His long hair tickled his back, so Harry let his hair go back to the standard short he was used to. As he went to sleep, he unconsciously relaxed his transformation until his natural form resurfaced.

Harry spent the next month becoming more comfortable and familiar with changing his eyes, hair, face, nails and skin color until he could unconsciously hold the transformation overnight. After that, at Shugui's suggestion, Harry spent another month studying the human anatomy to experiment with the idea of growing taller. With Shugui and Doctor Kadowaki standing by, Harry tried it for the first time, and

succeeded, though the height transformation took longer than the others, as Harry needed to focus on several pieces of his innards at once – mostly the length and size of his various organs. Harry spent much of his time before school started becoming proficient in his new technique.

Harry practiced on his own and found that if he focused hard enough, he could also change the clothes he was wearing to accommodate the new size, or even change them to be something else.

Harry celebrated his birthday with Shugui, Headmaster Cid, Squall, Zell, and a girl who he'd gotten to know a bit better in the school library. Quistis was the same age as Harry, with long blond hair she kept in a ponytail and a pair of round glasses.

Harry hadn't completely mastered changing his height in under three seconds, which was his goal, when school started, but even so, Harry created two different bodies, both of which he believed his natural one would progress into when it finally grew older. The first one, Harry had carefully constructed with Doctor Kadowaki's help to look his age and would be working on slowly throughout the year. A couple of inches taller than what he was normally, it looked approximately six years old, keeping mostly the same characteristics of natural Harry.

The second was a mostly adult body, what Harry thought he would look like at age seventeen. After getting used to being so far up from the ground, Harry was able to pass for a SeeD candidate easily, being far more mature than a six-year-old should be. Harry took to training in this body so he could use an adult-sized gunblade.

Having progressed into second grade, Harry very quickly became a tutor for those struggling in second, third and even fourth grade. Harry tried to refuse the money that the parents whose children he helped gave, but Harry quickly found that Shugui had opened an account in his name where the parents deposited the money anyway.

As a result, when second grade finally ended, Harry was quite a rich kid, and had progressed to seventh grade assignments. Third grade work was a far cry from the difficulty of fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grade assignments, so Harry found himself occasionally asking his

teacher for help if he failed to figure it out after a week of puzzling. At the end of the year, he had only just finished sixth grade assignments, as they were much harder. So Harry went to third grade and did his seventh grade work, making good money as a tutor at the same time.

Harry had decided to wait until the summer after third grade to work on his Parseltongue, since he had no idea how it would develop and he didn't want to give away his secret yet. No one of the people who knew Harry's secret had any idea how to become an Animagus, so Harry gave that up as a lost cause.

The discussion that led to the decision that Harry would indeed return to his birth world had been a sore one. "What do you mean, I have to go back?!" Harry screamed. "I'm happy here, damn it!"

"I know," Headmaster Cid acknowledged. "But our Scan spell on you has told us that your lightning scar is a direct link to this Dark Lord Voldemort. I know it said that the Killing Curse was reflected onto him, but the continued presence of the link worries me. We have no idea what kind of magic they have in your world, so for all we know, Voldemort may be able to follow you here, and we certainly don't need another Sorceress-level power being here, especially if Voldemort's as evil as the Scan implies."

Harry stayed silent, hearing the logic but not liking it one bit. Headmaster Cid saw this and gave him a weak smile. "I am sorry, Harry, but think of it this way: when you get back, you'll be able to learn even more about magic, about how your world uses it."

Harry was smarter than the average seven-year-old, and recognized the blatant play on his interests. That didn't stop him from falling victim to it. "I suppose," Harry drawled. "But I have no idea how to get back."

"You don't, but I have an idea," Headmaster Cid said with a smile. "You see, there's a legend stating that Odin, a GF who refuses to be junctioned, but helps out anyone who has earned his respect occasionally, has the power to transcend space and time, giving him the ability to appear literally out of nowhere as he does when he helps."

“What does this have to do with me?” Harry asked. He couldn’t see the connection.

“Odin may be able to use his power to transport you back to your home world,” Cid explained. “Unfortunately, Odin is one of the strongest Guardian Forces there are. As such, you are nowhere near powerful enough to challenge him. Additionally, his location is unknown.”

Harry slapped his hand to his forehead. “So why are you telling me this?”

Cid looked piercingly at Harry. “To find Odin, you will need to travel quite a bit to the various continents. The best way for you to do so is to be SeeD.”

“You want me to become SeeD?” Harry asked with a raised eyebrow. “What a coincidence. That was going to be my career choice.”

“That’s good,” Cid said with a smile. “I do have some more good news. You won’t need to leave for several years. It appears time goes slower in your world, which is why your normal body is taking so long to grow; it’s keeping pace with your dimension.”

Harry brightened. “Great! What’s the time ratio?”

“According to Doctor Kadowaki, every two years here is one year there. We think that you should try to get back to your world before your body turns eleven, if possible. We don’t know when your world’s magical schooling starts, but we’re assuming that they take you as you hit puberty. Besides, you told us that the sun was being blocked by the moon when you left your world. Since we’ve been researching dimensional traveling for generations here, and no one’s discovered your presence here, I’d say it’s safe to assume that Voldemort’s not going to make a dimensional portal in six years, especially as he is, at least, expelled from his body.”

“What makes you think that?” Harry asked curiously, wondering how Cid had come up with that.

“Simple. The Killing Curse defeated him, but he’s still alive. Consider the fact that three and a half years passed after you defeated him. If he had a body, then he would have killed you by now. So, there’re a few options. One: the spell destroyed his powers and he fled. That’s unlikely, as he probably could have recovered his powers eventually. Even if he couldn’t, that eliminates him as a threat. Two: the spell separated him from his body and he’s trying to get a new one. That would take some very powerful Life and Curaga magic from a second party, combined with a recently dead body.”

“I see,” Harry said slowly. “And since he was evil, he’s not likely to have anyone trying to bring him back; why resurrect someone more powerful than you if you want to be the evil overlord?”

“Exactly,” Cid confirmed, pleased that Harry had thought of that on his own.

“That sounds pretty reasonable,” Harry agreed, doing some mental calculations. “I was five when I got here, six times two is twelve years. I’ve spent two here already. Ten to go. Plenty of time.”

“That’s actually perfect, because if you become a SeeD early, which I have no doubt you will, you’ll have years to explore the world and grow more powerful as you go,” Cid told Harry.

“Sounds like a plan,” Harry agreed. “Is there anything else, Headmaster?”

“No. Care for a game of cards?”

After losing a close game with Cid, Harry looked around Garden to find Shugui. Locating him after an hour of searching, Harry convinced him to take him to Dollet to buy a snake. There was only one way to Dollet: by sea. They didn’t go directly, however, as Shugui knew that this would be an excellent chance to hone Harry’s skills, and draw new magic.

So Harry and Shugui set off to Dollet, taking nothing but the essentials. Shugui let Harry do most of the fighting and backed him up whenever Harry needed healing. That was fairly common at first, as Harry was unused to facing monsters stronger and faster than the

ones just outside Balamb, but he quickly improved to the point that Shugui decided to just let Harry fight on his own unless absolutely necessary.

Harry had refused to junction his magic for the time being, wanting to improve without junctions first. That didn't stop him from drawing and casting spells, however. Harry cast his low- and medium-level spells carefully and quickly, but he had a tendency to hesitate with the higher-level spells, like the few Blizzagas he had found.

When Shugui asked about it, Harry shrugged. "I found that my magic core merely multiplies the spells I have. The more powerful ones take longer. Once I have a nice solid fifty or sixty Blizzagas, I'll probably start using them."

Harry didn't voice his other concern aloud, but he was also worried about accidentally harming his body by casting too-powerful spells. Simply stocking the Blizzagas at the moment was a little stressful, though it decreased with each monster Harry killed. Harry was a little afraid of the stress his body would handle if he came across Ultima or Death.

Four days after they left, Harry and Shugui arrived in Dollet and found the Pet Shop. Harry's eye instantly fell upon a truly beautiful snake with scales the color of jade that sparkled in the light. Buying the snake with money from his rather immense account, Harry and Shugui stocked up on some supplies – primarily Potions, Tents, Remedies, and a few Ethers – and stopped by the Weapon Shop, where Harry upgraded his Revolver to a Cutting Trigger.

As they left Dollet, Harry pulled out his new pet. Since he had no idea how to speak Parseltongue, he simply decided to talk to the snake normally. "Hello," he said to the snake, except it came out as a hiss. Shugui looked at him in astonishment, but Harry was too interested in the snake's sudden jerk to respond.

"You speak the noble snake language?"the snake demanded, raising its head up several inches from its coiled body to look Harry in the eye.

"So it would seem. What's your name?"

"I am called Seth. What is your name, human?"

"Harry James Potter. Please call me by my first name, Seth."

"I understand, Master Harry."

Harry frowned. "Why do you call me Master?"

"It is an old law among the serpents. Any human who can fluently speak our language has our loyalty and subservience."

Curious, Harry asked, "What happens if there is more than one speaker?"

Seth looked away, and if Harry had to put an emotion to it, he would have said that Seth looked uneasy. "If they work together, then we serve them all. If they are enemies, then we serve whichever earns the respect of Hydra."

"Is Hydra a Guardian Force?"Seth hissed an affirmative. "Do you know where Hydra resides? I would greatly like to earn his respect in case I find any enemies able to speak this language."

Now Seth looked down, appearing almost ashamed. "No, Master. Hydra has been missing for many years now."

Harry smiled wistfully. "Oh well. Enough of this Master business, just call me Harry. I'm Master of no one."

"I suppose, Ma – Harry. I would like to get some sleep now," Seth pleaded. "The temperature is just right."

Harry chuckled. "Wrap around my left arm here and you can sleep there and use my body for heat."

"Thank you, Harry."Seth coiled himself around Harry's left arm and let out a hiss of satisfaction rather like a purr. "Perfect. Thank you again."

Before Harry could answer, Seth was sleeping. He chuckled again and looked at Shugui, who was watching him analytically. "I suppose I was speaking Parseltongue?"

“Yes, you were,” Shugui confirmed. “It sounds really creepy, though.”

Harry laughed at him, then ran like hell as Shugui chased him across the plains, promising retribution. He wasn't able to go as quickly as he could though, as the Gravija-enchanted clothes weighed him down. Fortunately, by the time Shugui managed to catch him, he was laughing along with Harry.

The rest of summer passed fairly quickly amidst all the training. Harry finally achieved his goal of being able to change his height in under three seconds, and his Parseltongue ability grew to the point where Harry needed to be addressing a snake, but he didn't need to be face-to-face with one. Harry's personal magical core was growing and had sped up the regeneration of spells. Beginner spells – such as Blizzard, Fire, Thunder, Cure and Esuna – doubled every two weeks. Intermediate spells doubled every four weeks, and his few Advanced spells – the most dangerous currently – doubled every two months. As a result, by the end of summer, he had several hundred of each Beginner spell and about three hundred of each Intermediate spell, enough to never need to worry about running out of them again.

As Harry's spells were stored in his magical core, the core was forced to expand each time a significant increase was made. The Beginner spells were rather small, but several hundred small spells still took up some space. Thankfully, Harry found that his max limit for the stock of any single spell was one thousand. Harry had no doubt that when it came time to leave for his birth world, he would be a very powerful man.

Seth was a handy addition to Harry's monster encounters, as the snake had an intensely powerful venom that almost always succeeded in casting Slow on the monsters, and occasionally Petrify. Harry now had a constant source to draw Slow, Petrify and Cura from, though doing so tired Seth out rather quickly. It was rather unnecessary anyway, as Harry essentially had unlimited of all of those.

Eventually, though, the summer ended and school began once again. Harry once again took up his job as the resident low-pay tutor in between his training and homework. He'd finished all the work for all

seven years of standard schooling, so he had enrolled for the SeeD classes. Unlike the standard schooling, there was little opportunity to speed through the years. The first SeeD year was dedicated to learning about the responsibilities of SeeD, in addition to physical training. The second year was then for learning how to draw and cast magic while learning the possible dangers of doing so. The third year was the year in which all the students chose a weapon and trained with it. The fourth year was a year for learning related subjects that SeeD members needed to know, while the fifth, sixth and seventh years were the opportunities to become SeeD. If one failed the third time, that was it. Throughout the years, the students were expected to donate their own time to training.

In other words, the first two years, at least, are a waste of time, Harry mused outside of class. I could train in a second weapon during third, I suppose. Few know that I use a gunblade, and there's no point in revealing that when I could learn another weapon, which could be useful. Fourth year sounds pretty interesting, though. No matter; right now, I've got my own training to do. First, though, let's get a Scan.

Harry focused on the Scan magic and willed it on himself; he no longer needed to say the Beginner spells aloud. Much of the readout was the same, but Harry skipped ahead to the Special Abilities section.

Metamorphmagus: Extremely Proficient. Has strong control over entire body, but as yet cannot transform cross-gender.

Parselmouth: Intermediate. Capable of addressing snakes unseen.

Untrained Animagus – able to, with training, turn into an animal that represents his personality and spirit at will.

Threat Level: 21.

"Hmm," Harry murmured to himself. "Level 21. Not bad at all for someone without a Guardian Force to power him up. Haven't even equipped my junctions..." Harry glanced at his watch; he had a few hours to spare. "Aw, what the hell. To the training area!"

It appeared he was not the only one with that same idea, as he saw six or seven other SeeD candidates also training in there. But before he could greet them, a huge T-Rexaur leapt out of the forest and landed in front of him, screaming a challenge.

Harry allowed himself a smirk as he drew his gunblade. Rushing forward, Harry leapt up in the air and slashed horizontally across the T-Rexaur's hide, but it was resistant even to the upgraded blade. His momentum carried him into the T-Rexaur's chest, and Harry used it to stab the monster deeply, but it missed the vital organs.

The T-Rexaur screamed in pain and used its right claw to grab Harry and throw him to the ground, planning to stomp on him. Harry rolled over, narrowly avoiding the monster's foot. But then the monster kicked Harry hard, and its claw sliced open Harry's clothes and landed three deep cuts in Harry's chest.

Harry was now truly pissed. This T-Rexaur was smarter and stronger than average. He felt his energy surging through his body and let loose a Limit Break, "Sword of Divinity!" Harry ran incredibly fast, ignoring his wounds as he then started to run *up* the monster, digging his gunblade deeply at the point where the legs met the body and slicing upwards as he ran until he cut straight through the head, whereupon he jumped high in the air and performed an aerial flip so he faced the monster.

The sun lay directly behind Harry as he gathered his raw magic and energy into his Cutting Trigger. "Shining Star!" Harry cried, slicing the air in the shape of a five-pointed star with the gunblade, sending five blood-red waves of jagged energy that sliced into and through the T-Rexaur. When Harry landed, the T-Rexaur fell apart, literally, before fading away as all monsters did for some reason when they died.

Harry felt much weaker now, but he focused on his magic. "Cura!" His deep wounds healed moderately fast, though it stung. Now he looked at what the T-Rexaur had left behind, and discovered two Dragon Fangs, a Dragon Claw, and a T-Rexaur card.

"That was a truly impressive Limit Break," a voice said from behind him, and Harry jumped; he hadn't heard Instructor Shugui approach.

Shugui's voice was full of amusement when he spoke next. "It seems that you still have some work to do on sensing around you though."

Harry flushed, embarrassed by his inattentiveness. "Yes, Instructor. Is it just me, or was that T-Rexaur more powerful and smarter than normal?"

Shugui nodded gravely, his playful demeanor evaporating. "I'm afraid that's a side effect of having killed so many monsters. You gain a small portion of each of your kill's strength. As you kill more monsters, the stronger versions of your normal monsters deem you a threat."

Harry frowned but nodded. "I see. Thank you for explaining." *Interesting... That means I can still progress at a decent pace while I wait to graduate.*

"I should have told you before," Shugui said seriously. "I apologize for that."

"Don't worry about it," Harry said blithely. "I'm still alive, aren't I? And you didn't mean any harm."

Shugui smiled, relieved that his powerful student held no grudges. He knew full well that Harry was growing stronger by the day, and he was still training in Graviija-weighted clothes. *Soon he will surpass me...* He wished the best of luck towards anyone who had the ill fortune of becoming Harry's enemy; the odds were that there wouldn't be much left of them when Harry was through.

He watched as Harry packed the items he had just gained, and gripped his gunblade firmly, ready for the next fight. Chuckling softly, Shugui left, knowing that Harry could take care of himself and wondering what poor creature would face Harry's frustrations now. He heard an animalistic scream and laughed hard, recognizing the sound as another T-Rexaur.

The years passed slowly, and Harry's friendship with Squall, Zell and Quistis grew. When they were eleven years old, Harry's friends enrolled in the SeeD Academy, having finished the seven years' worth of work a year early with Harry's tutoring.

At that point, Harry had finished his third year of SeeD courses. He had decided to simply continue his gunblade training, as there was no point in hiding his power amongst fellow SeeD members. Anyone decent could perform a Scan on him and find out about it anyway, Harry figured.

That had actually already happened from his official Instructor, Tsuru. Tsuru was a rather attractive brunette, according to the rumors that Harry heard being wildly spread around during lunch. This was her first year of instructing, having only just received her Instructor's license. She was eighteen, and time had been very good to her. Harry was rather sickened to hear some of the fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds share fantasies involving her, and promptly forced himself to forget it using his mind training.

Tsuru had, at the beginning of the third year, used Scan on Harry and all of his classmates to ascertain their names and learn a bit about their backgrounds. Upon using it on Harry, her face had reflected complete and utter shock. "Can we talk after class, Mr. Potter?" she asked in a strangled voice.

The others looked at Harry jealously, especially after he acquiesced. At the end of class, Tsuru confronted him. "OK, why the hell are you in this class? You've got to be at least a SeeD already!"

"Why's that?" Harry had responded, raising an eyebrow.

"Your stats are amazing! You're much stronger than me, and you've got those Special Abilities. How old are you really?"

Harry thought for a moment. "Physically, or years lived?"

"Both."

"Well, in my natural form, I'm actually only seven and a half years old. But that's because my body develops according to my former dimension's time, which is half that of here. I've lived ten years total. I arrived here when I was five."

Tsuru's eyes bugged out. "You're *ten*?" she hissed. "Just what the hell are you?"

Harry shrugged. "A hard worker, and a genius according to my other teachers. I spend most of my time training or reading, or hanging out with my friends when I can."

"Why not stay in your natural form, then?"

Harry looked at her with a frown. "Didn't you hear me? My natural form's bloody seven years old, woman! No one would respect me in a child's body! There's a reason I've almost mastered my Metamorphmagus abilities!"

Tsuri nodded, calming down and thinking rationally. "You're right, of course. May I see your natural form?"

Harry shrugged and released his thirteen-year-old disguise, feeling himself shrink rapidly, the ground rushing back up to him. He had chosen to look as if he'd been ten when he entered, as that was generally the lower age of those who entered. He looked up at Tsuri through calculating emerald green eyes, but Tsuri had a strange expression on her face.

"Oh, you're so *cute!*" she squealed. Harry sweat-dropped, and quickly put his disguise back on with a disgruntled look at Tsuri, who giggled softly, self-conscious of her spontaneous outburst. "Come 'ere, you!"

Harry ran off like his life depended on it, Tsuri in close pursuit as they left huge plumes of dust in their wake. "AH! Insane Instructor! Coming through!" he yelled, whipping past a large group of boys who looked at him strangely, as if *he* was the insane one. That was, until they saw Tsuri with a positively evil-looking grin on her face. Tsuri completely trampled them, and one rather jealous boy muttered, "Lucky dog..."

Harry turned the corner and had an idea: he morphed his body into Squall as fast as he could. He watched Tsuri quietly, raising an eyebrow in perfect imitation of the quiet boy. "Can I help you with something, Instructor?"

"Ah, Squall! Have you seen Harry?" Tsuri asked. "I'm rather in a hurry."

“He took off that way as if Cerberus himself was at his heels,” Harry-Squall replied, pointing towards the training area.

“Thanks!” Tsuru said, running off in that direction. “Oh Harreeeeee!” she called. “Come out, come out, wherever you are!”

Harry-Squall shivered, and began walking to the Kitchens as casually as he could. He suddenly heard Tsuru’s scream “HARRY!” Panicking, Harry turned into the next person he could think of – Shugui – and turned around, walking away from the kitchens.

“Instructor Shugui!” Tsuru greeted, pausing from her run. “Have you seen Harry or Squall? I need to talk to them quickly.”

“I see. I saw Squall start running to the Kitchens after you screamed Harry’s name. May I ask what they did?”

Tsuru was not a SeeD for nothing. She could lie like the best of them. “Harry forgot some of his homework for class, and Squall lied to me about where he was.”

“Well, good luck then.” Harry-Shugui nodded his head dismissively and resumed walking briskly away, smirking inwardly as Tsuru bolted to the Kitchens. As soon as she was out of sight, Harry transformed back into himself with a sigh of relief. That relief, however, was quickly shattered when he heard Tsuru’s “Aha!”

“Aw, shit!” Harry groaned before beginning to run at a pace that allowed him to maintain the same high speed for several minutes. “How did you know that was me?”

“I didn’t!” Tsuru responded. “But you got me once using the same trick! Fool me once, shame on you! Fool me twice, shame on me! So I waited a moment and watched from behind a corner!”

“What will it take to get you to stop chasing me?” he demanded, jumping onto one of the hallway walls and bouncing off it to make a tight turn while maintaining his velocity.

“Let me catch you!” Tsuru responded simply, mimicking Harry’s feat.

“Not a chance!” *Guess now’s a good time to see just how fast I can go if I junction magic to my speed!* With a few moments’ concentration, Harry junctioned his Fira spells to his speed portion of his muscular system. Suddenly, the speed he was going at seemed slow, as if he was simply striding down the halls. With a mischievous grin, Harry said aloud, “Let’s see how fast I can go now!”

Tsuri smirked. “Harry, you can’t possibly go much faster than...” She shut up when Harry suddenly sped up to about three times his old speed, easily losing Tsuri. Tsuri slowed to a stop, her jaw dropped in wonder. “OK, maybe you can go faster.”

Harry got to his quarters and quickly locked the door before sitting down with a sigh of relief. He unjunctioned his Fira, marveling at the raw speed he held at his disposal. “Wow,” he breathed.

Well, that's the end of Chapter One. Long, I know. I actually have the entire story written out, I'm just getting all the typos, errors, and all that. Besides, I want to see what your reactions are to each chapter, so read and review, please! I'll update next week on Sunday!

Background

It has recently come to my attention that many of my readers have not played Final Fantasy VIII, so I'm going to give you a brief rundown, and a list of all the spells.

The land of Final Fantasy VIII is called Terra, and is divided up into several countries, among which are Balamb, Galbadia, Esthar and more. Balamb is situated on an island in between the other larger continents. Galbadia is to the West, and Esthar to the East. Google "Final Fantasy VIII map" and you'll get a better idea of what it looks like. In any case, each country has its own Garden, the home base for SeeD - a heavily trained mercenary group whose original purpose is to handle any and all Sorceresses who grow out of control. A Sorceress is unlike any other person in that she will never, ever run out of spells. Having so much power often requires a Knight to ground the Sorceress, or else the Sorceress will go insane. Some do anyway, which is where the SeeD come in. Their job is to take care of the Sorceresses by any means necessary.

However, training the SeeD requires money, and lots of it. Hence, the reason why they became mercenaries. People will send in jobs to the appropriate Garden, and Garden will send out SeeD to assist. Oftentimes, it is reinforcements for an invasion. Getting the Garden started, however, required that Headmaster Cid take out a loan from a being called Norg. Norg belongs to a race that is usually very exclusive and peaceful, but he is different in that he has succumbed to greed. This will come into play later.

Guardian Forces. These extremely powerful beings could be compared to Eidolons from other Final Fantasies. Beings that usually encompass one of several elements, they live in special "junction stones" until acquired by a SeeD. At this point, they will help the SeeD who has them to the best of their ability. Having a Guardian Force allows the normal SeeD to "draw", "cast" and "junction" spells. Additionally, the SeeD can call the Guardian Force out to do tremendous amounts of damage to all enemies, or perform a special effect.

Drawing spells is merely sensing and absorbing a spell from a monster, or from the field. The type of spell recieved is usually based on the type of monster faced. For instance, a SeeD could draw Fire from a low-level fire elemental monster. Casting spells is exactly as it sounds. Junctioning a spell, however, has different benefits. Instead of outright damaging the monster, it allows the SeeD to use that spell's power to boost his own abilities. Quetzalcoatl explains how it works in "A Whole New World".

Note: Guardian Forces of opposing types REALLY don't like being junctioned together.

The SeeD's ultimate attack... a Limit Break. Almost exactly what it sounds like, the SeeD breaks his (or her) own limits and does an incredible attack, based on who does it and with what weapon. Can't be done repeatedly unless in a very desperate situation, or if Aura is cast.

Guardian Forces

Quetzalcoatl - Thunder elemental being, attacks directly

Shiva - Ice elemental being, attacks directly

Ifrit - Fire elemental being, attacks directly

Pandemona - Wind elemental being, attacks directly

Carbuncle - Non-elemental being, casts Reflect on all allies

Cerberus - Non-elemental being, casts Triple on all allies

Diablo - Non-elemental being, depletes all enemies' health by a percentage determined by its level (i.e. if Diablo is level 42, 42 percent of enemy's remaining health is depleted)

Brothers - Earth elemental being, attacks directly

Siren - Non-elemental being, attacks directly and casts Silence on all enemies

Alexander - Holy-elemental being, attacks directly

Tonberry King - Non-elemental being, attacks directly with a Kitchen Knife. o.O Main benefit is better prices at stores

Leviathan - Water-elemental being, attacks directly

Cactuar - Non-elemental being, attacks directly with its needles.

Doomtrain - Poison-elemental being, infects all enemies with several status ailments.

Eden - Non-elemental being, attacks directly from space.

Bahamut - non-elemental being, attacks directly

Phoenix - Legendary Fire-elemental being, resurrects all allies if all should fall in combat, and deals fire damage to enemy. Appears randomly. Cannot be junctioned.

Odin - Legendary Dark-elemental being, kills all enemies in one blow at start of combat. Appears randomly. Cannot be junctioned.

Beginner Level Spells

(Note: Keep in mind that Fira, Blizzara and Thundara are Intermediate Spells, while Firaga, Blizzaga and Thundaga are Advanced spells. I just didn't want to put the same definition 3 times)

Fire/Fira/Firaga: shoots a fireball from the caster

Blizzard/Blizzara/Blizzaga: shoots an icy stream from the caster

Thunder/Thundara/Thundaga: shoots a bolt of lightning from the caster

Cure/Cura/Curaga: heals the recipient to a degree

Water: sprays a powerful jet of water from the caster

Blind: temporarily takes a person's sight

Silence: temporarily takes a person's ability to speak

Slow: slows down the victim's movements

Intermediate Level Spells

Sleep: puts the victim to sleep for a while

Float: makes the person float a few feet in the air

Bio: shoots a heavily poisonous stream from the caster; always poisons

Drain: drains the victim's strength and transfers a portion into the caster

Stop: completely stops the victim's movements and thought processes

Berserk: forces bloodlust to overcome the victim, causing him to attack without thought to the victim's own health or allies

Protect: creates a magical shield against physical attacks for a short time

Shell: creates a magical shield against magical attacks for a short time

Advanced Level Spells

Reflect: creates a magical shield that will reflect most magic for a short time

Tornado: Creates a tornado

Quake: causes a small earthquake

Petrify: turns the victim to stone

Life: provided that it's cast soon enough after death, resurrects the person, but the person is still weak and needs to recover

Meltdown: drains a person's vitality to zero, essentially making them susceptible to anything

Zombie: turns a person into a mindless zombie obsessed with killing everything around it

Regen: causes a slow regeneration

Break: shoots a ray from the caster's hand; victims find themselves knocked out

Gravija: multiplies gravity to an extent for a short time on the victim, slowing them down immensely and causing immense pain as bones start to crack.

Meteor: Sends meteorites from space to do immense damage to all enemies

Pain: makes the victim blind, dumb and poisoned

Ultimate Level Spells

Death: kills the victim instantly

Aura: allows people to use their Limit Breaks repeatedly, without charging

Flare: very powerful fire/ice/electric attack

Full-Life: provided that it's cast soon enough after death, resurrects the person and heals him completely

Holy: holy elemental blast attack

Ultima: ultimate spell, causes immense destruction with a powerful explosion

Hope that helps you all. Let me know if it was too long or anything, or if you have any other questions, review!

Chapter Two: The SeeD Exam

Looking back, Harry had to admit that being chased by the insane-teacher-in-search-of-chibi-Harry had been excellent training in using his Metamorphmagus skills, not to mention his legs. Tsuru had calmed down and no longer tried to capture Harry for the “cute seven-year-old” that his natural form remained.

After that first experience, Harry did not junction his magic at all while at Balamb Garden; nothing could keep up with him when he did, and it made killing the various monsters far too easy for Harry’s tastes. Besides, he didn’t want to attract negative attention for his uniqueness.

He already had more than enough attention, in fact, because his proficiency with the gunblade had somehow gotten out later in his third year of SeeD training. Harry was the first one in over a decade to specialize in the gunblade, much to Cid’s delight. Students young and old came to see how he was progressing. After a week of patiently waiting for the novelty to wear off, Harry lost his temper in the middle of lunch.

Harry had been sitting with his friends when Seifer, who was in his second year, approached with a cocky grin. Squall’s eyes had narrowed dangerously, while Zell’s face was one of undisguised anger. Harry let his right hand hang low, close to his gunblade, when he saw that Seifer, too, had a gunblade. Harry’s gunblade was sheathed in a back holster. Harry had thought it was more efficient, as he could quickly draw it and swing it up to block or attack in one smooth motion.

“What is it, Seifer?” Harry asked coolly.

“You think you’re so hot with a gunblade,” Seifer said arrogantly, “how about a match against a true gunblade specialist?”

Harry was instantly assaulted by several voices. Above them all, one loudmouth could be heard. “Do it, Harry! Kick his ass!” That was obviously Zell.

But Harry ignored them and returned to his food. "I would think that you had better survival instincts. I have no wish to kill you and get myself expelled, thank you."

Seifer's face clouded in anger, and his two cronies whose names Harry could not remember looked angry as well as the crowd chuckled around them. "I'm challenging you to a duel, damn it! Or are you chicken, Chicken-Wuss?"

That did it, and all of Harry's friends knew it. Harry stood up slowly, deliberately, and his eyes locked onto Seifer's, burning with cold fury. "If you are so eager to die, then far be it from me to deny you," he hissed (in English). Raising his voice, he addressed the crowd that had gathered around them. "Seifer Almasy has challenged me, Harry James Potter, to a formal duel. I accept. You are our witnesses."

The older Instructors looked at each other worriedly. A formal duel was, simply put, a one-on-one battle until one of the duelers yielded or died. The custom of the duel was very old, and transcended the rules of Balamb Garden. There was nothing they could do now.

"As the challenged, it is my right to choose the place of combat," Harry announced, his voice cold. Seifer looked a bit surprised, and Harry sneered at him. *Not my fault he didn't look up everything about customs.* "I choose the field just outside of Balamb Garden."

Harry now looked expectantly at Seifer, who appeared a little confused. Harry sighed. "As the challenger, you must decide the conditions of the battle – what weapons, magics, junctions and such are available."

"Oh." Seifer quickly recovered, plastering a face of pure confidence. "Gunblades are the only weapons allowed. No spells, junctions or Guardian Forces allowed."

"Very well," Harry said solemnly. "Are you ready at this time, or do you require an hour to prepare yourself?"

"I'm ready to go whenever you are!" Seifer asserted cockily.

“Then let us travel to the place of combat,” Harry said formally, turning and striding quickly outside, Seifer close behind. Everyone else in the Kitchens or on their way to them followed from a distance.

“Ooh, Harry’s pissed!” Zell said happily.

Quistis blinked and looked at him. “What makes you say that?”

“He uses big words a lot when he’s angry,” Zell explained simply.

“Harry only speaks so formally when he’s struggling to contain his temper,” Squall said neutrally. “Didn’t you notice?”

Quistis frowned. “He’s never really gotten angry around me.”

Once everyone was outside, Harry and Seifer were thirty feet apart from each other. Harry took off his jacket, sweatshirt and sweatpants, and in the back with the Instructors, Shugui’s eyes widened. “Holy shit, he’s really pissed,” he whispered.

“What?” Tsuru asked, confused.

“He’s been wearing clothing enchanted with Gravija,” Shugui explained quietly. “If he’s dangerous with it on, he’s outright deadly without it. Seifer will be lucky if he lives through this match.”

Tsuru’s eyes bugged out at Shugui’s words. But she turned her attention back to the present as Harry finished undressing, now clad in a tight black long-sleeved shirt that left little of his torso to the imaginations of the girls, and a pair of equally black form-fitting pants. With his shoulder-length hair tied in a ponytail – Harry had let it grow out, tired of his eternally messy short hair – and his green eyes blazing, Harry was truly a sight to see.

Seifer looked a little nervous, especially when Harry dropped his weighted clothes, which left an impression in the ground. Nonetheless, he drew his gunblade. Harry held up his hand first, however. “Wait. We must each make a solemn oath on our blades to uphold the rules as named previously. I shall go first. I, Harry James Potter, swear on my gunblade that I do not have any Guardian Forces or magic junctioned, nor shall I junction them during our

match. Furthermore, I shall not cast any spells for the duration of our match. This I swear. If I should break my oath, shall too my blade be broken." Harry's gunblade glowed white, acknowledging the oath. Seifer repeated Harry verbatim, and his blade glowed as well.

"Damn, he's really serious about this," Shugui muttered, seeing Harry follow each custom of the duel to the letter.

"Finally, we must agree upon a signal for the match to start," Harry continued. "To keep it simple, I suggest a simple count to three. On three, we start."

"Alright. One..."

"Two..."

"THREE!" Seifer cried, rushing at Harry with his gunblade held out to his side. Harry merely stood still with his gunblade ready. When Seifer got close enough, he jumped and slashed down at Harry. But then, Harry's gunblade was suddenly there, blocking. Surprised, Seifer had no chance to attack again, as Harry slammed his fist into Seifer's ribs, sending him flying back at least fifteen feet. When he got up, Seifer was clutching his chest where Harry had hit him. He was in obvious pain.

"Lesson one," Harry intoned. "Never underestimate your opponent, for it will be your downfall." He sheathed his sword, bent down and reached into his belt pouch, pulling out a book and flipping through it to where he was when he left it. "Having just seen an example of your attack, though, I shouldn't need my full attention for this fight."

"What the hell?" Seifer demanded. "I'll show you!"

Seifer got up angrily, and attacked again, this time running in for a stab attack. Harry merely sidestepped at the last moment, and Seifer kept going, not expecting that. Harry took advantage of the opportunity to kick Seifer in the back, which sent him stumbling forwards. Seifer fortunately had the presence of mind not to fall on his sword, but he was definitely off balance for a couple of seconds.

"Attack me, damn it!" Seifer screamed. "Draw your gunblade!"

“Lesson two. A weapon may be powerful, but the wielder must not put all his faith in it. There are always other ways to attack. As you may have noticed, I have already struck you twice, and you have yet to land a blow.”

Seifer began to panic; even when Harry was distracted, reading a book, he couldn't land a blow on the raven-haired youth. He charged, holding his gunblade horizontal in front of his chest, sharp end aimed at Harry. When Seifer got too close to dodge, Harry ducked and swept Seifer's legs out from underneath him. Seifer fell backwards, landing hard on his back. Harry kicked Seifer's gunblade out of his hand and stepped on Seifer's chest, putting away the book with a sigh before looking at him.

Harry's eyes bored into Seifer's as he stated, “Lesson three. Never rush blindly at your opponent, for it is a sign of desperation and weakness. Do you yield?”

“No!” Seifer said defiantly.

Harry sighed again and removed his foot from Seifer's chest, backing up ten paces. “Do you truly want me to show you of what I am capable?”

“Yes!” Seifer insisted. “None of that fancy footwork, show me your skills with a gunblade!”

Harry closed his eyes for a moment, gathering his resolve, then drew his gunblade. “I have given you a chance to yield when it was clear you were defeated. I shall give you one more. Give up, Seifer, because if I attack with this weapon, you will die.”

Seifer almost appeared to consider it, but his pride won out. “Let's do this!”

Harry took a deep breath and nodded. “Then you have chosen your fate.” He ran at Seifer with incredible speed, but when Seifer slashed with his Revolver, judging when Harry would be in range, Harry was not there. He looked around frantically, then saw the crowd pointing above him.

Seifer looked up and saw Harry falling from the sky, both hands gripping his Cutting Trigger. Seifer barely got his gunblade in a defensive position before Harry's vertical slash slammed into it with enough force to knock it out of Seifer's hands, severely jolting his arm in the process.

Seifer, knowing that he had no chance without his gunblade, dove down and grabbed it as he rolled out of the way of an attack he was certain was coming his way. Jumping up, he looked around, only to see Harry merely standing there. "Lesson four. Don't get tunnel vision; keep your mind open to possibilities, and anticipate the plans of your enemy and prepare for them."

Harry then rushed at Seifer, gunblade held diagonally downward across his torso, and Seifer was panic-stricken. *How do I block him? He's so strong!* He slashed wildly at the incoming gunblade-wielder, only to miss widely. Seifer suddenly felt cold steel at his throat.

"Lesson five," Harry whispered, but everyone could hear him in the silence. "Panic and fear cloud the mind, and affect your technique badly. Stay in control, and don't let your emotions get in the way when it comes time to do what needs to be done. Now, yield, or will I have to cut your throat?"

Seifer didn't dare swallow, but hoarsely said, "I yield." *I didn't even last three attacks from him, and the first one disarmed me. How weak am I?*

Harry backed off, sheathing his Cutting Trigger. "Lesson six. Your instinct may lead you through battle, but your brain can keep you out of unnecessary ones. Think before you speak or act, or you may find yourself dead." With that, Harry walked over to his weighted clothes and pulled them on over his skin-tight clothes that served as his under clothes.

Harry didn't know it then, but he'd just earned the respect of everyone present, student and teacher alike. The name Harry Potter suddenly became synonymous for "wise warrior". The instructors were impressed that Harry had reigned in his temper and refrained from harming Seifer permanently, hopefully teaching him something in the

process. The six lessons he'd stated aloud were quoted by teachers throughout the school for generations later.

The students suddenly gained a new role model, a person they compared themselves to and aspired to be. They gave Harry a new nickname as well: Teaching Warrior, or as his friends began to call him playfully, TW.

The years slowly passed as Harry found himself involuntarily famous, an instant celebrity for having already shown such skill with the gunblade despite being so young, and knocking Seifer down a peg or three without a scratch. People whispered about him, and fell quiet when he walked amongst them.

Harry was very frustrated by it all; it wasn't like he was some savior or something, and he wasn't about to smite down anyone who irritated him. But he couldn't really do anything about it except being himself. *Those who matter know who I am*, Harry reassured himself.

In Harry's fifth year, he received his primary Guardian Force, Quetzalcoatl. Harry trained with his GF often, increasing their compatibility to maximum. Quetzalcoatl was generally very quiet, but was definitely interested in the outside world. Generally, though, Quetzalcoatl only spoke to Harry when helping him make important decisions or to warn him of a danger he'd overlooked.

Not far into the year, Harry Scanned himself, and was a little disappointed; his threat level had seemingly leveled out at thirty-five. This was not terribly surprising, however, when Harry thought about it. The monsters had been avoiding Harry like the plague for a while now, always running away from him. Harry had not liked this new behavior one bit, as it meant that the gossips had even more to talk. Apparently he'd grown too strong for any of the monsters present in the training area or the field around Balamb.

Harry sighed; that meant that there was little point in training. He had long ago surpassed the students, and even some SeeD had some trouble sparring with him, thus increasing his reputation as the Teaching Warrior, which was quickly growing larger than life. Harry had once overheard one student telling another how TW could use Ultima already. Harry had, at this point, stepped in and corrected

them. “No, as a matter of fact, I can’t. And I wouldn’t even try to stock it; my body wouldn’t be able to handle it. Amazing how quickly a reputation grows, eh? Pretty soon they’ll be saying I can bring back the dead or that I’m the reincarnation of some ancient warrior...”

The boys had been awestruck to even be in his presence, so Harry quickly gave up and walked away. He could have sworn that he heard one of them whisper, “He’s even cooler than you said he was!”

Speaking of spells, Harry, at this point, had the maximum amount of every Beginner spell and most of the Intermediate spells. He had three Advanced Spells that were slowly growing: Blizzaga, Curaga, and Firaga. Despite what he had said, Harry wondered if he could indeed stock the Ultimate spells: Meteor, Meltdown, Aura, Death, Holy, Flare and Ultima. Harry could only imagine how powerful he’d be if he had the power of a thousand Ultima spells junctioned, and the prospect almost made him shiver. *I’d be the most powerful being alive*, Harry thought, half scared, half in awe. *They’d probably call me Ultima Warrior.*

:It is highly unlikely that your body would ever be able to handle such power: Quetzalcoatl reminded him.

Harry sighed. *Yeah, you’re right as usual.*

:Why not spend some time with your friends?: Quetzalcoatl suggested. *:Training has little use at the moment, so use the time to enjoy life.:*

Harry brightened. “Thanks,” he said aloud, and then strode off to find his friends. Finding them all, he invited them to go see a movie in Balamb. “My treat,” Harry promised.

Each of Harry’s friends had agreed immediately, and on the road to Balamb, Harry told them of his training dilemma. “So you see, I’ve got very little to do this year.”

Zell shook his head, highly amused. “Only you, TW, could get into a situation like that.”

“How’re your magic reserves?” Quistis inquired curiously.

“Got a thousand of almost everything I could draw,” Harry replied offhandedly, thinking of which movie they were going to see. *Wait a sec, did I say that aloud?*

:I believe you did.:

Shit. Harry turned around to see three sets of dropped jaws. “Er, guys?”

“You’re exaggerating, right?” Zell weakly asked.

Harry sighed and shook his head. “Sorry, can’t lie to you guys. I’ve got one thousand of most of my spells.”

“How can that be?” Quistis muttered. “The maximum is one hundred!”

Harry shrugged. “I’m weird. Can we just leave it at that?”

“Harry, the strongest warriors out there have some Ultima junctioned,” Zell suddenly said, having a thought. “Imagine if you had a thousand junctioned!”

Harry looked down with a small smile. “I had the same thought. But Quetzalcoatl told me that my body probably wouldn’t handle it.”

“Where did you find the time to get that much magic?” Squall asked pointedly. “Gathering so many spells should have taken months of constant drawing, and that’s if you found the creatures you wanted and weren’t interrupted at all.”

Harry frowned. “Perceptive aren’t you, Squall. You’re right. I have a... special condition that multiplies my spell stock over time. Essentially, I never have to worry about drawing another Beginner- or Intermediate-ranked spell again.”

There was a moment of silence as this information infiltrated their brains. As the moment dragged on, Harry was worried that his friends might be angry with him for keeping it a secret. “That’s so cool!” Zell cried out. “Any chance that we can catch this condition?”

Harry smiled, relief showing on his face. "I'm afraid not. Guys, to explain everything, you guys just need to cast Scan on me."

A few seconds later, Squall muttered, "Boy-Who-Lived? What the hell?"

"Voldemort?" Zell asked. "What kind of stupid-ass name is that? Sounds like Moldy Wart!"

"You have your own personal magical core?" Quistis read aloud in shock. "That's your special condition?"

"Time goes slower in your world? That explains why you grew so slowly," Squall commented as he continued reading.

"You can shape-shift and speak like a snake at will?" Zell asked excitedly. "You've just got to show me that!"

Harry chuckled as all three of his friends looked at him curiously. With a brief look of concentration, Harry transformed into Headmaster Cid, then into Instructor Shugui, then into Zell. The real Zell appeared startled by that particular transformation, but then grinned.

"Cool, you must be able to get out of jams real quick with that!"

"Saved my life when I was escaping from Tsuru..." Harry shivered, recalling the memory.

"Wait a minute!" Quistis said. "The Scan said that your time goes slower than ours. So what do you really look like?"

Harry looked at her suspiciously, but sighed. *I guess she's not quite old enough to react like Tsuru did.* He released his age transformation and reappeared as a rather buff eight-and-a-half-year-old. Harry kept his hair style, though. After a minute, Harry morphed back into his fifteen-year-old body. "Can we go to the movies now?" Harry asked impatiently.

"Wait, what about the Parselmouth thing?" Zell reminded him.

"Fine. Seth, come on out."

Seth uncoiled from Harry's left upper arm where he resided whenever Harry went outside Balamb and moved down to Harry's wrist, coiling around it loosely and raising his head to look at the others.

Harry nodded. "I suppose introductions are in order. This is Seth. Seth, the blond jumpy one is Zell. Tall dark and broody is Squall, and the slightly emotional girl is Quistis."

Harry's friends repressed a shiver; hearing Harry speak in hisses was rather unnerving. Seth chuckled at Harry's descriptions, which came out as a very weird kind of hiss to the ears of the people in question. "Tell them I am pleased to meet them. Any friend of yours is a friend of mine."

Harry related Seth's message, then let Seth go back to sleep as they resumed their walk to the movies. Harry, being a gentleman at heart, let Quistis pick out the movie. Minutes later, all the boys were regretting that decision, as Quistis had chosen one with a prominent love story. It was basically a movie about a Sorceress that was trying to conquer the world, and one lonely SeeD, the last survivor of an attack on Balamb Garden, chased after her, finding love along the way. At the end, after the hero defeated the Sorceress's Knight, his love sacrificed herself to save him, who in his grief cast all the Ultima spells he had in one massive blast. There was nothing but a large crater at the end, and the hero and his love was immortalized by a statue in Balamb forevermore.

Harry was quiet and thoughtful when they left the theater, as opposed to Zell, who had seemingly enjoyed the movie and was talking animatedly with Quistis. Squall was silent as usual, but he seemed pleased that the movie was over. Harry had a sneaking suspicion that Squall didn't understand the idea that a SeeD, a hired mercenary for all intents and purposes, would let himself form such a dependence to anyone to be utterly destroyed if she died, and as such disregarded the movie as near-worthless.

Which led Harry back to his own thoughts. *Would I let anyone in so far? Have I already?* He knew that he would sacrifice himself gladly for any of his best friends, but the question was whether he would be

emotionally destroyed by any of their deaths. Yes, Harry decided. *I would if it were by any other method than old age.*

After another month of tutoring anyone who needed it and sparring with his friends – in which Harry always won – Harry was called to the briefing room. Harry knew just from the place that something important was going on. He wasn't a SeeD, and it was not yet time for the SeeD practical exam. *Maybe I'm being examined early?*

Harry saw evidence to that theory as he noticed a man dressed in SeeD examiner garb. Harry stiffened and saluted him and Headmaster Cid sharply. "At ease," Headmaster Cid said sternly. Harry did as he was told. "We have a mission that requires your unique talents," Cid began. "In particular, your affinity for disguise. These men will explain the mission."

The tallest of the examiners nodded, and clicked a button that made a map of the world appear, with labels for the towns. "Dollet has heard some disturbing rumors of a factory that Galbadia has built to manufacture Materia. Ultima Materia to be specific. As you know, Dollet is perilously close to Galbadia Garden, which has recently provided a dozen SeeD to protect this area here." The examiner indicated an area between Galbadia Garden and Deling City.

Seeing Harry comprehended his statements so far, the examiner continued. "We've been contracted to investigate these rumors. You are to meet with Dollet's mayor first, and you will be following his orders throughout the mission. Upon determining the truth of the rumors, the mayor will tell you what to do next. This will be a long-term mission, and will receive rank 10 pay for the duration. Any questions?"

"I have yet to see a reason why my talents of disguise are necessary," Harry said, frowning. "Any established SeeD member could successfully accomplish this mission. Why choose an Academy cadet? There's something more."

"Perceptive," the examiner commented to Headmaster Cid.

"Indeed he is," Cid said with a note of pride.

The examiner turned to look at Harry almost piercingly. "The purpose of your... Metamorphmagus abilities... will be explained upon your arrival in Dollet. If you complete this mission successfully, you'll graduate the Academy and become a true SeeD. The rank will depend on your actions during the mission. You leave tonight."

Harry saluted once more, made an about-face, and left, his mind calculatingly discussing all the implications with Quetzalcoatl.

:He had better not mean what I think he means!: Harry seethed.

:If you are referring to matters relating to sex, I believe you are safe: Quetzalcoatl said logically. *:After all, Balamb Garden would never act as a brothel.:*

:Yeah, you're right: Harry admitted. *:I wonder what my Metamorphmagus skills are going to be used for?:*

:There is no point in wondering. We will find out tonight.:

But I HATE waiting! Harry whined.

:I know.: Quetzalcoatl's voice had a note that sounded suspiciously like amusement. *:But wait you must.:*

Harry sighed aloud, drawing a few stares his way. He jogged off to find his friends and in a hushed voice told them of his assignment. "But don't tell anyone," Harry pleaded. "I don't want people to know about my powers. It's bad enough they dote upon my gunblade skills."

"Gotcha," Zell said.

"We'll just let everyone know that you've gone on personal training mission with permission from Cid," Quistis volunteered.

"Just don't let yourself get killed," Squall said coolly, but Harry could hear the undertone of worry.

"Thanks guys, you're lifesavers," Harry murmured thankfully. "I gotta go pack now, so I'll see you when I get back."

“See you later,” Zell offered. The others nodded. Harry got up and left for his room. Once there, he looked around, trying to think through what he might possibly need, pulling them out as he thought of them.

OK now... Gunblade? Check. Item bag? Check. Hi-Potions? Not that I need them, but check. Remedies? Check. Spare set of clothes? Check. Tents? Check. Good, I'm all set. Harry put everything into his Item Bag, which was magically modified to hold up to one hundred of any item without increasing the size of the bag, which was smaller than a backpack. All he needed to do was think of the item he wanted while reaching inside the bag and he'd automatically grab hold of one. And when he picked up an item with the intention of putting it inside, the item shrunk and jumped by itself into the bag. Harry wasn't quite sure how the manufacturers did it, but the bag was certainly helpful.

Harry slung the bag over his shoulder, put on the gunblade holster he used, and walked out the door, heading directly for Balamb, easily killing a few monsters that foolishly got in his way. When he reached the docks, the boat was already waiting for him, along with Shugui and Tsuru.

“What are you two doing here?” Harry asked, surprised.

Shugui shrugged. “Wanted to wish you luck and see you off. Can't come with you, unfortunately.”

“We're needed at Balamb Garden,” Tsuru said apologetically. “Sorry.”

Harry smiled. “It's alright. I'll be back before you know it.” He walked down the bridge into the ship, raising his right hand in a silent gesture of goodbye.

The ship went on for about twenty minutes before landing on a beach. Harry got out calmly, and walked up the street for several more minutes before reaching the Administration building. Harry opened the door and walked in. Looking around, he silently admired the décor. Then Harry noticed that the secretary, a pretty brunette about seventeen or so, was looking at him strangely.

Smiling at her, Harry said, “Hello, my name is Harry Potter. What's yours?”

"Tracie Price," she responded with an almost dreamy quality in her voice. "Can I help you somehow?"

Harry nodded. "The Mayor's expecting me, and I was wondering if he's in?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," the secretary responded. "He left about five minutes ago for dinner. He should be back in about fifteen minutes."

"Fifteen minutes, eh? Oh well, at least I have someone to talk to." The secretary blushed, but Harry couldn't for the life of him figure out why. He decided to let it go. "So, Tracie, you live all your life here in Dollet?"

"Yeah. I've always wanted to travel, though. See the world and all. You do any?"

Harry shrugged. "Not too much, but I come back and forth between here and Balamb. I'm kind of an outdoors person, so I've been all sorts of places on the field. Sometimes I went to Timber, but they're in the middle of some revolution, so..."

Tracie nodded sadly. "Yeah, that's Timber all right. They're still under Galbadian control, but they're trying so hard to get out."

"I'll be doing some more traveling pretty soon," Harry said with a smile. "I'll be heading to Deling City."

"Ooh, I've wanted to see what that city's like for years!" Tracie said excitedly. "Do tell me that you'll be coming back! I want to hear it from you!" Then she blushed again.

Harry ignored the blush and nodded. "I don't know when I'll be coming back, but I will and then I'll tell you all about it." *I will need to go to Deling City eventually, Harry reasoned with himself. For supplies and such. Maybe an upgrade for my Cutting Trigger.*

Tracie's thoughts were something of a more romantic nature. *Oh, he's just perfect! He's so handsome with that ponytail and piercing emerald eyes... He's a traveler too, and a nice guy to boot! What more could a girl ask for?* Poor girl; she didn't even know Harry was

only eight and a half in his natural form, though he had matured far past his twelve years of life.

"So, how about after your meeting with the Mayor, you and I go find some dinner?" Tracie asked tentatively.

"Sounds good," Harry agreed, completely ignorant of Tracie's plans. "Know any good places around here?"

"Sure!" Tracie said, ecstatic that Harry had accepted. "I'll take you there when you're through with the meeting."

"Great."

Just then, the Mayor walked in. "That was some good food..." he looked at Harry and Tracie, who was blushing again. "And who might this young man be, Tracie?"

"This is Harry Potter, sir. He says that you were expecting him," Tracie informed her superior.

"Ah, so you're the famous Harry Potter from Balamb Garden," the Mayor said with a smile. "My name is Trent Brillers."

"Hello, Mayor Brillers," Harry greeted. "If the mission is as sensitive as I gathered, perhaps we should enter your office. Wouldn't want outside ears to get a hold of the information." At Tracie's slightly hurt look, Harry quickly elaborated for her. "Nothing against you, it's just that this is really, really important, and if we're out here, then it'd be easy to overhear."

"Oh," Tracie said softly, but picked up her spirits as best she could. "I'll see you after the meeting, then." *He's SeeD? And about to go on a mission? Of all the rotten luck... I find the perfect guy, and find out he's a mercenary...*

Harry and the mayor walked into his office. "So, what do you know?"

"There are rumors about a factory between Deling City and Galbadia Garden that has the capability of manufacturing Materia. You want me to investigate it using my talent for disguise and report back to

you, upon which you give me further orders on the subject of what to do about the factory,” Harry summarized.

Mayor Brillers nodded. “Good. You will need information on how to get in, however, as this is no ordinary job. There is a twenty-foot tall, barbed wire electric fence surrounding the area. Galbadia Garden has accepted a contract and issued a dozen SeeD to the area to protect it from any and all intruders. Two are stationed at each corner of the fence, while the remaining four guard the sole entrance to the place.”

“Why not dig underneath them?” Harry asked.

“The factory uses natural gases from the ground to power their production, according to what little information is actually public,” Brillers informed him. “We cannot dig without blowing ourselves up.”

“I see. How do I get in undetected?”

“On Friday at seven o’clock in the evening, one truck always leaves the complex and drives to a cave near Galbadia Garden to deliver the goods. All very hush-hush, of course. There are always ten SeeD guarding it, and they let no one in. But no one guards the truck on its way to and from the factory,” Brillers said cunningly. “The truck returns at eight in the morning on Saturday.”

“Ah, you want me to hijack the truck and disguise myself as the driver to get in.”

“Precisely. Today is Sunday; you have until Friday to get there. Then, when you find out the truth, report back to me on the following Friday.”

“Understood.” Harry saluted and walked out of the office where Tracie was waiting. “Now that that’s over with, shall we?”

Tracie smiled at him. “Let’s.” Along the way, Tracie got up the nerve to say, “So, when are you leaving for your mission?”

“Tomorrow morning,” Harry replied. “I’ll be gone for a while.”

"I'm sorry to hear that. You been SeeD long?"

Harry grinned. "No. Actually, this is my examination mission."

Tracie frowned. "I thought a whole bunch of people did those at the same time?"

"Normally, yeah," Harry admitted. "Fortunately, or unfortunately depending on how you look at it, I'm not exactly ordinary."

"How's that?" Tracie asked, curious.

"Sorry, classified," Harry offered apologetically.

"Oh." Tracie was quiet for a few moments. "We're there."

They went inside and sat down. Shortly, a waitress came by and took their order. "So... I haven't heard the name Potter around," Tracie began. "Where you from?"

"Well, no one really knows," Harry said. "I was found when I was five, right outside Balamb Garden. Headmaster Cid arranged for me to go to school in Balamb and then encouraged me to join the SeeD Academy. So I did. Fairly simple life, but I've been able to move around a bit as I was trained in how to deal with the monsters outside." *Yeah, all that's true, but I'm from another dimension!*

"Do you like killing monsters?" Tracie asked tentatively.

Harry shrugged. "I don't like the job of killing them, but I can't deny the rush I feel when I stand victorious over them. And then there's the fact that killing them protects people, and I get stronger for every monster I kill... I'd rather it didn't have to be done, though."

"Do SeeD retire?" Tracie blurted.

Harry nodded. "At the age of forty. But not many live out that long. Being mercenaries is dangerous, you know? And some choose not to retire and continue on as a teacher in Garden."

"How often would you normally get sent on a mission?"

"It depends, actually, on the length of one's previous mission and how many requests Garden gets. Then if you have a specialty, that can affect it as well. Since I have some rather unique and impressive specialties, I might be called out quite a bit for the more dangerous battle and spy missions. But I wouldn't be sent as a pilot or anything. You know what I mean?" Harry took a huge bite out of his hamburger.

"I think so," Tracie said slowly, sipping her soup. "How old are you?"

Harry smirked at her, swallowing hard to get the burger out of the way. "If I told you, you wouldn't believe me."

"Older than you look?" Tracie guessed. Harry shook his head mirthfully. "Younger? How much younger?"

"Not saying!"

"Come on!" Tracie pleaded.

"Honestly I can't say! It's part of the confidential stuff!" *I'm twelve. What's going on? She's asking all sorts of questions...*

:If I were to hazard a guess, I would say that she's flirting with you.:

You can't be serious.

:Indeed I am. Look at the evidence. She has blushed no less than three times in your presence for seemingly innocuous queries. She invited you to dinner the very night you met her. She's curious about your life and your chosen career. She even asked whether SeeD retire, which suggests that she wanted to know if you could before becoming too old. After she found out that you would be forty, she then asked how often you would be sent on missions. This suggests that she wanted to know if you would be able to spend much time with her. All the evidence suggests that she has an infatuation for you.:

Harry couldn't deny it when Quetzalcoatl put it that way. *Oh hell... I'm freaking twelve!*

:I know that, you know that, but she doesn't.:

Harry could have slapped himself. *Great, so what do I do?*

:That is up to you.:

You're such a great help, Harry thought sarcastically.

:Thank you.: The sarcasm was not lost on the GF, but he greatly enjoyed watching Harry come up with solutions on his own.

They had been quiet for almost a minute now as Harry talked with Quetzalcoatl, and Tracie was looking at Harry quizzically. Harry shook his head and smiled at her, though the smile now looked a little forced. "Just talking to my GF. He was making a few comments about our conversation." Harry ran his hand through his hair, unwittingly endearing him further to Tracie.

"Well, what'd he say?"

Harry called upon his great prowess at lying. "Merely that I should actually ask you some questions as well for this to be a true conversation." He watched as Tracie blushed again. *Yep, it's for certain now.* "Listen, Tracie... I can't tell you how old I am, but I will tell you this: I'm just not ready for a relationship if that's what you're looking for. I'm sorry. You really are very pretty, and charming, but I'm not looking for anyone right now."

Tracie felt her heart plummet. "Oh... I didn't come on too strong or anything?"

Harry smiled and shook his head, glad she was taking it well. "No, not at all! If I was only a few years older, I'd probably have taken you up in a heartbeat."

Tracie cheered up a bit at that. "Well, I'll just call you my little brother, then."

Harry's smile grew a bit. "I think I'd like that, big sis." They finished their meal talking to each other amiably, and Harry paid for the check before parting ways. Harry went to the hotel, prepared to get some sleep, and Tracie returned home.

Harry junctioned his most efficient spell to his speed, and as a result, made it to the site in only a day and a half. Harry was glad to find some different monsters, and to his delight found some more Curaga and Firaga, in addition to some Intermediate spells he hadn't yet found, including Dispel and Float. Thanks to his speed junction, Harry was easily able to evade almost all enemy attacks, and took advantage of this to take over a hundred and fifty of each new spell he found. Harry believed that considering that it would take a month for each Intermediate spell to double, and how little he used some of the spells, that would be enough.

On the other hand, Harry was encountering monsters that were able to cast Protect and Shell upon themselves, and Harry found himself using Dispel more and more often as the monsters he faced grew stronger. Thankfully, the monsters that he could draw Dispel from were plentiful.

Harry continued on to Deling City, which he found to be a city seemingly constantly cloaked under the cover of darkness. Harry wasn't quite sure why, but the popular legend went that there was a Sorceress centuries ago that cursed the land as she died, forever preventing the sun from penetrating this area. Later, someone recognized the possibility of a city entirely devoted to the night life, and built Deling City.

After playing around a bit at the gambling hall and playing some cards, Harry took advantage of being in Deling City to get an upgrade for his gunblade, from Cutting Trigger to Flame Saber, which was similar to the Shear Trigger with the Cutting Trigger's handle. Its blade was red, which is where its name came from. It felt a little heavier, but it was nothing to an expert in the ways of the gunblade like Harry. Testing it out against the monsters on the way back, Harry was pleased to see that it cut through monsters more easily than his old Cutting Trigger.

Friday afternoon saw Harry on a cliff overlooking the road, waiting. Harry considered, then let the truck pass by underneath him. He didn't know anything about the driver's habits, so it was probably safer to take the truck the following morning.

When the time came and Harry saw the driver returning, he quickly jumped out and reached the road. Whipping up his hand and frowning in concentration as the truck approached, he yelled "Stop!" The truck and the driver inside suddenly froze in place, magically stopped for the next several minutes. Harry sighed and walked towards the truck, opening the door and pulling out the driver. To ensure that the man would pose no further problems, Harry had Seth bite him, which converted his Stop status to Petrified, before using a mild Cure to heal the bite wound. That accomplished, Harry drug the man to the ditch he had dug earlier and buried him. Petrified men don't need air, as their functions effectively are all frozen in time.

The difference between Petrify and Stop was very subtle, magic-wise. Stop and Petrify both completely halt all psychological and physiological activity. They each have their benefits; some monsters are immune to Petrify, while others are immune to Stop. Petrifying others causes them to be turned to stone, and can thus be broken, but it doesn't work as often as Stop does. Stop, on the other hand, wears off, while Petrify doesn't until it's cured with a Soft potion or Esuna.

Harry was planning ahead, for when he needed to leave. That way his presence could remain undetected without drawing any suspicion. Assuming the guise of the unassuming driver, Harry got into the truck and used Dispel on it, causing it to lurch into forward motion once again as if it had never stopped.

Reaching the gate, Harry was inspected by two SeeD members from Galbadia. One used a device to read Harry's iris, which thankfully Harry had changed to match the man's after looking closely into his eyes. The other cast Dispel on him. This was very risky, as Harry found that Dispel had an effect on his Metamorphmagus abilities as well, but Harry had found with Instructor Shugui that he could maintain the transformation with enough willpower. So he held onto his morph and was allowed in.

Harry parked in the spot obviously reserved for him, and suddenly realized a problem. *Great, they forgot to mention what to do next!* Thankfully for him, the driver kept a checklist of things to do each trip in the passenger seat, in addition to a nametag that revealed his

identity as Lieutenant Rorin Nubast. Pulling it out, Harry quickly memorized the list. There was only one left unchecked: *Report to Major Mevor upon return.*

Affecting a confident stride, Harry entered the building. Thankfully for him, on the wall by the doorway was a small map labeling where everything was. Harry quickly located Mevor's office and made his way there. He knocked.

"Come in."

Harry entered and saluted, Galbadian-style. "Lieutenant Nubast reporting, sir."

"Ah, welcome back Lieutenant. How was your trip?"

"It was uneventful, sir."

Mevor nodded, a smile gracing his face. "Good, very good. I suspect you're wondering what your next assignment is?"

"Yes sir," Harry agreed.

"I'm afraid it's nothing too glorious. Your job until Friday is to use the paperwork in that drawer" – Mevor pointed at a drawer that seemed full to bursting – "and compose our official semiannual production quotas. Then you are to compare them to the last semiannual quota and determine if we're falling behind schedule. I expect that report Friday morning."

"Understood." Harry was surprised by his luck; he'd been sent to verify the purpose of the factory, and now the information had fallen right into his lap.

:That would be my fault. I junctioned your Double to your luck stat before you entered: Quetzalcoatl informed his tenant. :It probably made him trust you with it.:

Well, I never...! Thanks.

:Your welcome.:

Harry took out the paperwork from the drawer and carried it to his desk a couple of offices down. Then he opened the first file, and his eyes bugged. *Holy shit... the rumors are right! This is a Materia factory!* Harry flipped through to the latest addition and almost fainted. *And they're making Advanced-level Materia! Curaga, Firaga, Blizzaga, Thundaga and Tornado!* Harry scanned the bottom note. *According to this, they're still working on trying to create the Ultimate spells. Thank God for small mercies.*

:That might not be true at the end of the week: Quetzalcoatl reminded him.

I know, but I can't do anything about it! I have to complete this monstrosity first!

:Then get to it. We don't have much time.:

Knowing this, but also knowing that he couldn't be seen using magic, Harry started working. He was working on it day in and day out, also committing the documents to memory and storing them behind his mental fortress. On Wednesday night, Harry completed the report.

In the course of his work, Harry had also discovered the process the factory used. It was quite ingenious really. It was based on the process of drawing magic. By drawing a spell from a monster and transferring the spell into a metamorphic rock, the spell was stored. As monsters stocked a seemingly infinite number of spells within them – scientists believed the moon had something to do with it – people could simply keep on making the Materia, provided that they had enough metamorphic rock, which Harry realized he had brought back in the truck he'd hijacked.

The problem with this was simply that it took a great deal of time for a person to develop sufficiently enough to handle the Ultimate spells, which was why they'd had no success making such Materia. Harry wasn't quite certain how the factory had managed to get so many monsters and locked them up in cages, but suspected that the Galbadian SeeD and the Petrify, Stop and Sleep spells had had something to do with it.

On Thursday, Harry gave in to his urge to visit the monsters and draw new magic. After stopping by the guard and making some casual conversation, Harry walked down the rows of cages, silently probing them for new magic. He found quite a few he wanted to draw, namely Firaga, Blizzaga, Curaga, Drain, Tornado, Bio, Break, Pain, Life, Quake, Regen, Reflect, Meltdown, and Zombie. He resolved to draw them that night when everyone was asleep, though Harry was a little nervous about Meltdown and Pain. Meltdown was a very powerful spell, capable of completely degrading a person's vitality, essentially exhausting them and leaving them weak to just about anything. Pain on the other hand was a completely status-based attack that always inflicted Blind, Silence, and Poison to any target, and provided protection against them if junctioned to status defense. Both were quite powerful. Quetzalcoatl reassured him, though, that his body could handle these spells, though it would be a little painful.

That night, Harry hid in the cover of shadows and cast Sleep on the guard for the night. Then he sat down and began to draw the magic to him, recasting Sleep on the guard every once in a while. By dawn, Harry had a few hundred of each spell, including Meltdown and Pain, though he could feel his body protest their presence greatly.

Harry had long since junctioned Esuna to his Status defense, and considering that he had a thousand of it, that created a perfect protection to every kind of status-changing spell or effect with the notable exception of death. As a result, he didn't need to equip Pain to his defense, but instead did so to his attack.

Harry now junctioned his new Reflect spells to his elemental defense. This would protect him from most of the damage from any elemental spells. Non-elemental spells would still provide a significant amount of damage, but it was reduced some.

:Do not forget, however, that powerful spells can still propel your body through the air and cause non-spell related harm. Tornado for example can pull your body from the ground and then throw you out of it into a cliff: Quetzalcoatl reminded him. :Also, just because your body is protected does not mean that your clothes and items cannot burn or become electrocuted. Spells can cause indirect damage that

way as well. Your elemental defense junction only protects you from elemental attacks with magical energy in them.:

Right, Harry acknowledged, getting up from his cross-legged position on the floor. He left the still-sleeping guard and made his way back to his office before anyone could notice he was up. Then Harry got his report, bound it up neatly, and took a quick two-hour-long nap, asking Quetzalcoatl to wake him up when it came time to turn in the report.

When Harry woke, Quetzalcoatl talked to him on the way to Mevor's office. *:You are quickly becoming a very powerful warrior, Harry. Be sure that you are not corrupted by your power.:*

With my friends and you there, that should not be a problem. I just need to make sure that my goals remain the same: to grow strong enough to protect my friends. Just then, Harry arrived at Mevor's office and knocked.

"Come in."

Harry saluted as he did so, and offered the completed report. "I have your report ready for you, Major."

Mevor scanned through it quickly. "Excellent work. The password for tonight's delivery is 'Watching Eagle'. Now go help the men load the cargo into the truck."

"Yes sir." Harry saluted once again and left. It did not take too terribly long to finish loading the truck, and Harry took a nap while he waited for seven o'clock.

Finally, the time came, and Harry got into the truck and left for the spot Mayor Brillers had showed him on the map near Galbadia Garden. Six SeeD came out to meet him. "Password?" one asked menacingly.

"Watching Eagle," Harry replied.

"Good. Now help us unload." Harry helped the SeeD unload the Materia and watched as the SeeD used Float on some boxes, presumably full of metamorphic rock, and deposited them inside the

truck. Harry nodded at them and drove off once more, this time to Dollet to report.

Harry parked directly outside of the administration building, and strode inside, dropping his disguise and reappearing as the seventeen-year-old version of himself. Brillers was waiting for him. "Excellent," Brillers said, ushering Harry into his office. "What do you have for me?"

"I'm afraid I am the bearer of bad news. The factory is indeed manufacturing Materia," Harry reported. "Large quantities of Advanced-level spells."

"Have they gone to Ultimate ones yet?"

"Negative. It takes much time of prolonged presence of large quantities of Advanced-level spells within the body to prepare it for the Ultimate spells, and the process relies completely on the ability to draw magic from monsters."

"How does it work?" Brillers asked curiously.

Harry hesitated, unsure of whether or not to spread the secret. *A job is a job, I suppose.* "A human draws magic from a monster and transfers it into a metamorphic rock. I'm unsure of the exact type, but suspect that it varies for each spell. Considering that humans require Guardian Forces to draw magic, this implies that there is a thief somewhere in one of the Gardens working to deliver the basic Guardian Forces. I would not be surprised to see several Shiva and Quetzalcoatl, perhaps even Ifrit or Carbuncle."

"That is disturbing..." Brillers murmured, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "How would you suggest we take care of this problem?"

"Personally, I would destroy the factory immediately after contacting Garden to let them know of a traitor. Headmaster Cid is more than capable of finding them while I take care of the factory. Nevertheless, the decision is ultimately up to you. As SeeD, my job is merely to follow orders when it concerns the assignment."

"I like your suggestion." Brillers turned on his computer and opened a real-time conversation window, calling Headmaster Cid's computer. After a few seconds, there was a connection.

"Headmaster Cid speaking," the voice said as Cid's face appeared in the window.

"This is Mayor Brillers. You got yourself a bit of a problem over there, Cid, but I'll let Mr. Potter here tell you 'bout it."

Harry got into the chair Brillers motioned to. "Headmaster, there's a high possibility of a traitor in our midst. Someone has been delivering Guardian Forces to the factory from my assignment."

Cid's face turned dead serious. "Are you certain?"

"Yes," Harry responded. "The factory had people drawing magic from monsters in order to manufacture Materia. While there is a possibility of Galbadia Garden providing the GF, I find it unlikely; if Galbadia Garden has, as we suspect, allied itself with Galbadia, then each side would want to maintain some kind of trump card over the other. Galbadia Garden would never simply give away power."

Cid received the unspoken message: *And no one else can draw magic without a Guardian Force.* "Message received. I shall investigate this matter personally. You are to be commended for bringing this information to my attention so quickly; I shall put in a recommendation for a higher rank."

"Thank you sir. I must go now, so I may complete my assignment."

"Very well. Hopefully by the time you're done this will all be sorted out."

"I hope so too, sir. I'll see you when I get back."

"I look forward to it. Goodbye." Cid's face disappeared from the screen, and Harry got up, facing Brillers.

"Sir? Your orders?"

“Simple. Destroy the factory. What will you need?”

Harry contemplated for a minute. “I should be able to do it alone if I get inside.”

“Then do it.”

“Understood.” Harry saluted and left, knowing that he would need to drive all night to get back to the factory on time. Harry stopped by the spot where he’d buried the Petrified driver, only to find that poor Rorin Nubast’s body had shattered. Harry recalled a slight tremor a few days past, but hadn’t thought it was strong enough to break a Petrified body. Apparently it had been strong enough here.

Sighing and shaking his head, Harry continued on to the factory. Once he made it inside using Nubast’s guise, Harry quickly made his way to the room that electronically controlled the entire factory, including the monsters’ cages, the electric fence, and the reactor below everyone that provided the heat necessary to transform the metamorphic stones with spells into Materia. There was no one there at the moment, as it was still fairly early morning, so Harry immediately began operating one console.

“Aha! As I suspected, a self-destruct sequence. But what’s the code? Damn it!” Harry cursed, slamming one fist into the console.

“Self-destruct sequence activated. Self-destruct in three minutes and counting,” a computerized voice broadcast throughout the factory.

Harry looked at his right fist with a smirk. “Emergency procedure number one, success!”

:Enough gloating, get out of there!: Quetzalcoatl demanded.

Right! Harry began running out, and noticed that outside, a crowd of half-dressed soldiers were running as fast as they could to escape the blast. Harry reached the elevator just in time for two Galbadian SeeD to appear.

“Who are you?” one demanded. “You know this place is off limits!”

"This must be the guy that activated the self-destruct sequence!" the other exclaimed. "Get him, so we can get out of here!"

Harry drew his gunblade and morphed into his seventeen-year-old self. "Sorry boys, can't let that happen. Firaga!"

One of the soldiers was too shocked at Harry's sudden change in looks to react, and was hit by the powerful fire attack, which caused him to go flying back into the elevator. He was slammed against the wall and crumpled to the ground, heavily burnt and unconscious.

The other soldier, however, kept more of his wits about him and evaded Harry's Firaga. "Thundara!" the soldier cried.

Harry rolled out of the way of the lightning blast before springing up and swinging his gunblade at the soldier, who blocked with a sword of his own and swept one hand back at his companion. "Cura!"

Harry frowned as the SeeD healed his partner. "Self-destruct in two minutes, thirty seconds," the computer announced.

As if that was a signal, both Harry and his opponent rushed at each other and tried their best to land a blow on the other, but each of them parried expertly.

I've gotta try something else! "Pain," Harry hissed, and his body burned in moderate pain as he cast the powerful spell that his body was not yet used to.

The SeeD dodged to one side. "Blizzara!"

Harry forced his body to work despite the pain he was suffering from. Summoning another of his recently-acquired spells, Harry yelled, "Reflect!"

The SeeD was apparently not prepared for that, and his own Ice-type move managed to clip him in the right leg. Now he was unable to move, and this suited Harry perfectly. "Thundaga!"

"Self-destruct in one minute, forty-five seconds."

“Shell!” The unnamed SeeD managed to bring up a magical protection in time, but wasn’t able to pour enough power into it to completely block Harry’s attack. Harry’s Thundaga tore through the shell easily and shocked the SeeD badly.

Wanting to finish it so he could escape, Harry ran over to the SeeD and cut off his head while the man was recovering. Normally, he would have just knocked him out, but Harry couldn’t afford to let anyone who discovered his Metamorph ability to survive. He did the same to the still-unconscious SeeD in the elevator, then punched the button to go downstairs.

“Self-destruct in one minute.”

“Come on, come on, hurry up!” Harry yelled at the elevator, which finally opened up.

“Self-destruct in twenty seconds.”

Quetzalcoatl, junction whatever the hell you have to my speed, now! Harry mentally screamed while running as fast as he could. Suddenly his speed tripled, and Harry took full advantage. It was a large factory, however, and the elevator was on the opposite side of the entrance.

“Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven.”

Harry could see the exit, and was running full-tilt.

“Six. Five. Four.”

Harry was past the door, and he could hear Quetzalcoatl encouraging him

“Three. Two. One.”

I’m not going to make it, Harry realized as he continued running, trying to get past the gates.

Then, the factory exploded.

So, does Harry survive? And if he does, is he seriously hurt? Wait till next week, readers. Read and review, please, and do let me know if I made some stupid grammatical error. I thought I caught all of those, but hey, I'm only human.

Chapter 3: Dumbledore's Dilemma

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore was not easily flustered. In fact, he was well known for his kind and patient temperament, as well as the fact that he always seems to know what's going on. He had been a grandfather figure to many of the students who attended Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and always had a word of wisdom or piece of advice.

It was Harry's seventh birthday, and Dumbledore had long since planned to use this opportunity to strengthen the wards surrounding Privet Drive. He couldn't go and check up on the boy, but he was certain that Harry was still developing nicely. Dumbledore was quite proud of his ingenuity. By placing Harry in the hands of his magic-fearing Muggle relatives, there was no chance that he'd learn much about magic. Then Dumbledore could step in and play the kindly old mentor when Harry came to Hogwarts – and he would get to Hogwarts, regardless of the Dursleys' wishes.

Dumbledore knew full well that Voldemort was not wholly dead. His plan was to have Harry encounter Voldemort once or twice in his spiritual form, then come with him to eliminate the Horcruxes. Then his name would go down in history for not only defeating Grindelwald, but Voldemort with Harry as his help.

There were a couple of possible problems, however. Firstly, Dumbledore couldn't predict the activities of Voldemort. He had plans to protect the Sorcerer's Stone at Hogwarts, conveniently during Harry's first year, and Voldemort would undoubtedly be drawn there by his need for a body. At that time, Dumbledore would allow Harry to progress through the trials and then save him at the last minute, thus endearing him further to the Boy-Who-Lived. But after that, Dumbledore wasn't certain of any sure method to draw Voldemort back again, aside from the fact that Harry Potter would be at Hogwarts.

The second problem lay in the fact that Dumbledore was uncertain of his capability to stay emotionally unattached to the young boy. If he started to care about his pawn, then the whole plan could be ruined.

Which brought the old man to his current problem, one he hadn't foreseen. "Where in the name of Merlin is Harry Potter?!" he yelled at the Dursleys. Petunia and Dudley cringed at the sight of the angry warlock, but Vernon admirably stood his ground.

"Why the hell should we know? He ran away two years ago!" Vernon bellowed. "Miserable brat!"

Silently, Dumbledore's thoughts echoed Vernon's sentiments. Potter was ruining everything! Then he suddenly recalled something vitally important. "Two years ago? Was it, perchance, on his birthday, the day of the eclipse?"

Petunia, eager to appease the Headmaster and get him out of her house, nodded. "The moon blocked out the sun only a few minutes after the Potter boy ran out of the house."

"And you let him go?!" Dumbledore roared, his anger rekindled. Now all three Dursleys were cowering as Dumbledore's intense magical power flared. "Perhaps you don't understand," Dumbledore said, calming himself enough to appear at least somewhat in control. "Solar eclipses are intensely powerful magical events, in which the impossible is made possible. If Harry ran away from home on that day, his accidental magic could have carried him anywhere! And he is vital to the peace of our world, the wizarding world!"

"Exactly!" Petunia screeched. "That's YOUR world! Not ours! We shouldn't have to have anything to do with your world!"

Dumbledore realized that he wasn't getting anywhere, and there was little point in continuing the argument; Harry Potter was missing, and Dumbledore wouldn't be getting any help from these distasteful Muggles. As it was, the defeater of Grindelwald had a boy to locate. "Then I shall take my leave."

"If you find the brat, we won't be taking him in again," Vernon vowed.

I won't leave you any choice in the matter, Dumbledore thought privately as he Disapparated to Hogsmeade to talk to his brother Aberforth, the bartender at the Hog's Head. He needed to call in some favors.

Over the next several months, Dumbledore enlisted the Hogwarts staff to finding the boy, despite a certain Potions Master's protests. He called in some contacts around the globe, and pulled some strings in other governments to keep a watch out, to no success. Even when Dumbledore had the brilliant idea of asking Fawkes, the phoenix who could find anyone, to locate Harry Potter, the phoenix merely shook his head. Either the boy was dead or so magically hidden that Fawkes couldn't find him.

Finally, on Harry's eighth birthday, Dumbledore brought his mighty power to bear and performed a location ritual of his own design. Requiring something of the boy's – Dumbledore returned to Privet Drive to retrieve the blanket the Dursleys had grudgingly given Harry – the ritual would allow Dumbledore to locate Harry Potter and check on his status.

The result was an exhausted and confused Headmaster. The ritual had revealed that Harry Potter was indeed still alive, but on a different world altogether! Balamb Garden, on a world called Terra. *Well, at least the name is promising*, Dumbledore thought to himself. *But how do I create an interdimensional portal?* He immediately began researching, recruiting his Charms and Arithmancy teachers to help him, swearing them to utter secrecy.

Unknown to Dumbledore, his location ritual had one major side effect – by temporarily connecting Dumbledore's consciousness to another world, the ritual forged a connection between the time streams, causing them to synchronize and move forward at the same rate.

Back on Terra, Harry woke up groggily. *Ugh, I've got a splitting headache...the rest of me hurts too.*

:I know: Quetzalcoatl said matter-of-factly. :Your entire body's got second and third-degree burns from the explosion, and you've got five or six fractures from being hurled through the air. You're quite lucky to be alive.:

Third-degree? Bringing his magic to bear despite the pain, Harry hoarsely whispered, "Curaga." His body immediately sped up the process of healing, fixing his bones rapidly. Harry opened his eyes and watched his body as the heavily burnt skin started to turn heal,

but when the Curaga faded, it wasn't quite done; there were still some second-degree burns, and Harry felt very, very sore. "Curaga." The second one did the trick, as now Harry's body felt fully healed, if not rejuvenated.

Wearily, Harry got to his feet and looked around. His item bag had apparently fallen beneath him and was protected from the blast, thankfully saving his supplies. Harry's gunblade, the Flame Trigger, was just fine, well-forged and had taken the heat well. Harry's clothes hadn't been so lucky; they were burnt to crisps, leaving Harry completely naked to the world. His eyes fell upon a large crater where the factory used to be. "Man am I lucky to have survived that," Harry murmured.

:It is rather impressive, no?:

"Yeah. How long was I out?"

:I do not know. I was unconscious just as you were.:

"Damn. Well, time for me to go report, then. Wish there was a car 'round here, or even some clothes, but I'll manage."

Not feeling particularly up to facing any monsters, Harry stuck to the road, running at a decent pace with his Triple junctioned to his speed. Along the way, he suddenly realized that he had killed two fellow men who had just been doing their jobs. *What have I done?* he thought in horror. *I... I killed two men! They might have had families, loved ones... and I just, just snatched away their lives without even hesitating! What am I?*

:You merely did what you had to in order to survive. You gave them a clean, merciful death, as opposed to burning and being crushed to death within the factory.:

But even so, they're DEAD now, and their blood is on MY hands!

:Harry, you must move on. If it is any consolation, they were SeeD as well, and as such prepared to die to complete their mission. You were all doing your jobs, you were simply better at it.:

Surprisingly, Harry did feel a bit better knowing that. Even so, he knew it would be a long time before the image of their deaths would leave his dreams. *Thanks, Quetzalcoatl. I needed that.*

It took Harry a day and a half to reach Dollet, but he hesitated before entering. He was still naked as the day he was born, and needed some clothes badly. Thankfully, his luck held out, and Harry noticed a bunch of clothes drying on a line only a little ways into the city. Biting his lip, Harry used his magically-enhanced speed and strength to get there, jump and grab a pair of trousers, quickly pulling them on. They were a bit big, but they'd do for the moment.

Harry immediately went to the nearest clothing store and bought another set of Gravija-enchanted under armor, and some clothes to go over it. Harry quickly went and hung up the pair of trousers again after cleaning them with a Water spell.

Now that he was properly clothed, Harry made his way to the Administration building. When he reached the Administration office, Mayor Brillers and Tracie looked at him as if they'd seen a ghost. Then Tracie tackled him with a speed Harry didn't realize she had, and hugged him tightly, crying into his shoulder.

Harry returned the hug awkwardly. "Er, is there something I should know?"

"We thought you were dead! The factory exploded four days ago!" Tracie sobbed.

Oh. Things make sense now. "Well, I'm fine. I'll admit, I wasn't when the place exploded, but hey! I survived, and that's all that matters. A few Curaga can fix just about anything if it's done soon enough."

:I'm surprised the Curaga worked. Normally such drastic burns require a stay in the hospital. You must have subconsciously combined the Curaga with your Metamorphing ability to heal and replace your skin.:

Tracie just sobbed harder into Harry's shoulder. *Um, Quetzalcoatl? Any ideas on how to calm a crying woman?*

:Sorry, I'm just as clueless as you at this point. I do find it amusing, though, that you've trained so hard in the ways of war, yet you are ignorant in the ways of women.:

Fat lot of help you are, Harry retorted before turning his mind back on the current situation: a crying woman was in his arms, and he had no idea what to do. Harry held her a little closer as an experiment, and was pleased to hear her slowly calming down. So, Harry held her tightly and let Tracie finish.

When Tracie finally broke off the hug, her cheeks were stained. "You must think me an overemotional girl," she belittled herself.

Oh dear, Harry thought. *Wish me luck, Quetzalcoatl; I am entering the realm of women's emotions. I may not survive.* "No, you were quite right to be worried. I don't blame you for latching on when you saw that I was alive," Harry floundered. Then he had an idea and ran with it. "After all, you're my big sis, remember? We're supposed to watch out for each other."

Tracie gave him a watery smile. "Yeah, I suppose you're right."

"Ahem," Mayor Brillers cleared his throat. "I hate to break up such a touching moment, but I must ask a few questions."

"Fire away."

"How did you blow up the factory?"

"I used the built-in self-destruct sequence to leave no trace."

"Did the monsters in there all die?"

Harry snorted. "I would imagine so, considering that I'm still alive. If any of them had been left alive, they would have finished me off."

"Did you discover any plans to make a second factory?"

"No. I find it unlikely that they will, though. That factory took a lot of time and effort to prepare; capturing monsters is not easy, and

neither is acquiring Guardian Forces to draw magic with,” Harry explained.

“Is there a possibility that Galbadia will retaliate?”

Harry’s face turned solemn. “There is. Timber revolutionaries don’t have the resources to call in a SeeD, and that’s what it takes to get past other SeeD. The rumors haven’t had time to spread across to another continent. Dollet is the only other option, so they may take revenge,” he said grimly.

“Recommendations?”

“Start building up your defenses, discretely mind you; you don’t want to automatically assume that Galbadia will attack, and public organization may egg them into an attack early. Save up some money so you can call in the SeeD if necessary.”

“Time estimate?” Brillers asked in a voice that revealed none of his emotions.

“Two, maybe three years to mobilize enough forces on Galbadia’s part,” Harry said after a moment.

“Very well. I must start drafting some new legislation in preparation for the upcoming invasion,” Brillers said in a hopeful tone. “I’ll phone Headmaster Cid to let him know of the contract’s completion. Dismissed.”

Harry saluted and turned to Tracie. They hugged for a moment. “Write me?”

“Sure,” Tracie responded.

With that, Harry walked out and towards the beach, where he was promptly picked up and taken back to Garden. Once there, Harry ignored any and all attempts at conversation and just fell into his bed, where he instantly collapsed, asleep before he hit the pillow.

The next day, Harry was summoned to Cid’s office. It took him several minutes, but Harry finally remembered why. *Oh, right! I’m*

going to be made a SeeD! I wonder what rank?... He'd been too preoccupied trying to complete the mission to actually think much about the details for after the mission was completed.

Headmaster Cid and the examiner were there, waiting for him. Harry saluted and stayed in that position as Cid spoke. "You have completed your mission successfully. Well done." He handed Harry a paper to look at later. "In that paper is your SeeD rank. Once again, well done." He leaned in closer and whispered into Harry's ear. "Finally, a gunblade specialist. You may need to return to your world soon, so make the best of your time here." Leaning back, Cid continued in his normal voice. "I, Headmaster Cid of Balamb Garden, hereby grant SeeD Harry James Potter the powers of a free agent, with the responsibility to help Balamb SeeD as you come across them in their missions."

Harry's eyes widened slightly; free SeeD agents were almost unheard of, for the simple reason that they were difficult to maintain contact with. They were allowed to travel anywhere they pleased when they were off-mission. Free agents had the duty to report back to the home base once per year for a minimum period of two weeks to fulfill their obligations as SeeD and complete a few missions before returning to their world travels. Once a month, the free agents were also to send a message describing in detail plans for the next month so Garden could make a strong attempt to contact them if necessary.

Free agent SeeD, however, could take missions from any of the various Gardens, but missions from home Garden took absolute priority, even if it was delivered through another one. Free agents also were to help out fellow SeeD from the same base, should they meet. Aside from missions, free agents also acted as foreign ambassadors to other places, essentially advertising the strength of their home Garden.

All in all, this was the perfect way to let Harry travel and locate Odin, the Guardian Force, to return to his own world.

After a moment, Harry recovered from his mental surprise to compose his face into neutrality again. Only someone looking for it would have noticed, but Harry's jaws had become almost slack, and

his eyes were a bit wider than usual. Aside from that, Harry's usual tendency to keep himself hidden behind a mask had paid off in that his emotions could not easily be read from his expression.

Upon being dismissed, Harry took a look at the paperwork he'd been given. *SeeD rank 13. Not bad pay. Free agent. GF Quetzalcoatl... not much else besides legal jargon. Oh, there are my mission stats! OK... looking good... excellent. Mission successful, my disguise skills are top-notch... oh, so that's why I got a nice high-up rank... alright.* Harry had reached his room by then, so he put down the sheet and began packing. Although Harry was normally a quite efficient guy, even he liked having a few comforts and mementos to remind him of good times.

Nevertheless, Harry was quickly packed up and ready to go. He sighed, not particularly looking forward to leaving his friends and going it alone for almost a year. He feared that the next year would be very monotonous: *Just travel, kill a few monsters here, draw some magic there, complete a mission every once in a while...* Harry sighed. *Man do I wish that I could go with someone else with me. Nothing against you, Quetzalcoatl, but there's nothing quite like spending some time with a human friend.*

:No offense taken. I understand your fear.:

Harry shouldered his pack and began to walk down the hall. *Best go say goodbye to my friends. If only they could come with me!*

Almost as if his thoughts had summoned them, Squall, Zell and Quistis turned around the corner into the hall that Harry was walking out of. "Harry!" they yelled at once.

Harry smiled genuinely. "Hey guys. How ya been?"

"Pretty good," Zell said with a smirk. "You?"

"Ah, some news for you guys. I'm officially SeeD."

"Wow!" Quistis said in awe. "How'd you do that?"

"You know that mission they had me do? They graded it as they would the normal SeeD examination."

"What rank are you?" Squall asked.

"Thirteen, actually. Not bad at all for a new SeeD," Harry said proudly. "Makes some pretty good pay."

Squall and Zell whistled low, then looked at each other in shock, as if they were surprised the other had done the same thing. Harry burst out laughing, and Quistis chuckled at their antics.

"Anything else?" Quistis asked, recovering quickly.

"Yeah. I've been made a free agent."

Squall looked at him, eyes widened, mouth slightly open. Quistis didn't look surprised at all. Zell, however, was confused. "A what?"

"A free agent. Means I'm supposed to travel the world and be a kind of Balamb Garden Ambassador in between missions," Harry summarized. "So I'm leaving Garden."

"There's another reason, isn't there?" Quistis asked shrewdly. "Free agents haven't been seen in decades due to the speed of communicating nowadays. This has to do with your, ah, uniqueness."

"Yes," Harry said, tipping an imaginary hat to her. "Has to do with my link to what's-his-face, Voldemort. Cid's worried that he'll find a way to follow the link here, so he wants me to go find a certain legendary GF."

"Which one?"

"Odin."

Zell whistled. "Good luck, man; you're going to need it!"

Squall appeared slightly concerned, and considering how only strong emotions made their way onto his face, that meant he was very worried about Harry but unwilling to show it. "You going alone?"

"I suppose so," Harry answered. "Was kinda hoping for some company, but hey, I should be fine with Seth. Right Seth?"

"Right, Harry."

Harry nodded and continued. "Anyway, you guys get nice and strong, because I'll be back here every year to check up on you guys."

"Right!" Zell said enthusiastically. "You just wait and see! I'm gonna kick your ass next time we spar!"

Squall rolled his eyes at Zell, but gave a small smile nevertheless and nodded at Harry. Quistis took out her whip and made a crack with it, her face shining determination.

"Right then. Well, just wanted to say goodbye, since I'll be going now... see ya next year!" Harry turned around and began walking out of Garden.

"Later!" Zell answered, waving goodbye at Harry's retreating back.

"Goodbye!" Quistis called out.

"Good luck," Squall said solemnly.

With that, Harry was gone. The next year went by rather slowly, as Harry killed various monsters, some incredibly easy, while some were so devilishly difficult that Harry had to use his Limit Break together with junctioning magic to his attributes. Eventually, Harry just had Quetzalcoatl leave the most effective magics junctioned. Monsters were getting more powerful, and Harry couldn't afford to be so arrogant that he'd die.

Scanning himself every once in a while, Harry was pleased to see a rapid increase in his threat level by the end of his first year outside of Balamb Garden. He'd traveled far and wide across the continent, but as he returned to Balamb for his mandatory fortnight in Balamb Garden, Harry knew that he had to go across the ocean to the other continents and islands to complete his quest. It was evident that Odin was not on this continent, which meant that his base had to be somewhere else.

There was one thing confusing Harry, however; his natural form's growth had sped up for some reason. According to Doctor Kadowaki, his growth was at normal rate, and had been since he was eight years old, which halved the remaining time Harry had left. Harry's body was officially nine and a half years old.

Thankfully, just as Harry was about to start his second year of traveling, he overheard an old storyteller speaking to children about the legendary Guardian Forces in Balamb. He personally hadn't heard any of the old stories, so, curious, Harry sat down to listen.

"Today, there are many Guardian Forces, but they are used by SeeD here in Balamb Garden," the storyteller was saying. "But there are legendary ones, ones that few have ever seen, let alone managed to communicate with. The most powerful of all these is Odin, the Death Knight. No one rightly knows where he resides, and he appears rarely. According to the SeeD, only those who have earned his respect may gain his help, and even then, Odin refuses to be junctioned like the others; he helps out as he sees fit.

"But long ago, Odin was a normal knight, a human just like you and me. He lived in an old town that people thought was the center of the world, and so called it Centra. Back then, all the continents were together, in one big continent surrounded by water. That town, the legend goes, was destroyed by bandits while Odin was away at war. When Odin returned, he was devastated by the destruction, and swore his most solemn vow to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

"It took him many years, but he finally found them. However, he was betrayed by the leader of a nearby village, who had seen his approach and alerted the bandits."

"Why'd he do that?" one child asked.

"Because the bandits were paying him to, and the leader was very greedy," the old storyteller answered. "Odin rode in on his magnificent horse, and killed them all. But the bandit leader managed to poison him with a deadly concoction, one for which there was no cure."

The children gasped. "What happened next?" one brave soul asked.

“Odin died, but because of his noble life, he was given a choice: to go on to the afterlife, or to remain here on Terra and help as he saw fit. Odin, bound by his honor as a knight, chose to become a Guardian Force, returning to his homeland to await those who would call upon him.”

Harry’s eyes widened. *Could it be? The answer to all my troubles lies in an old legend?* “Venerable storyteller, could you perhaps show me on this map where Centra would have been?”

“I’m afraid that even if I was willing, I have no idea. All I know is that the legend stated that Centra was, despite the name, located near the ocean on the old continent, to the south. The legend goes into far more detail, but simply put, Centra was surrounded by all four of the major elements: fire, water, air and earth. Air above them, earth beneath them, water to one side, and fire to the other.”

“Ocean and a volcano on opposite sides,” Harry murmured to himself. “The volcano is probably dormant by now, meaning that it’s merely a mountain. Thank you, old man.”

“Anytime you wish to hear more, feel free to come back!”

Harry went back into Garden and rushed to the computer lab, where he accessed Garden files.

User Name: Harry James Potter.

Password: Metamorph.

Accessing...

Done.

Query: Centra.

Searching...

Searching...

One hundred fifty three files found.

Harry spent the next several hours, skipping meals, reading the various files. He was beginning to get an idea where it was, and file eighty four confirmed it.

“On the island to the south surrounded by other islands with Chocobo Forests, there is a ruin commonly called Centra Ruins by the people of Fisherman’s Horizon! It’s got a dormant volcano nearby too!” Harry read aloud in triumph. Now Harry had a location, but the maps he was using showed him something that he did not want to see: just getting to the island would be difficult, due to the long dangerous reefs and rocks that made passage almost impassable.

I guess it’s time to call in a favor... Harry thought. Guess I’m going to need the best of the best, the White SeeD Ship!

A mere three days later, Harry was aboard the White SeeD ship on his way to Centra Ruins. Four more days into the trip, Harry was jolted awake. The captain’s voice was barking out orders.

“We’ve run into a rock! Get into those lifeboats!”

Harry jumped into one of the lifeboats, and was promptly followed by six or seven seamen, whence upon he started lowering the boat and rowed to the nearest safe shore. Shortly thereafter, everyone was safe and sound on shore, but the ship wasn’t sinking. Apparently it’d been completely grounded on the rock and would not sink for a long time until weather and the sea could wear it down.

Seth sputtered, hissing, underneath his wet shirt sleeve. “Must you get so wet?” Harry chuckled, but refused to answer his prideful snake.

Harry looked around and spotted the ruins. “Captain! I’m in need of this boat!”

“Aye, Harry! Good luck, and may you find what you’re looking for!”

“May the winds be kind to your sails!” Harry responded, now rowing in the direction of the island. “Good luck with the radio!”

After another hour, Harry reached a beach, and pulled the lifeboat up onto firm land so he could use it again later. Now Harry looked up at the ruins; there was one large tower still intact.

:If Odin's going to be anywhere, this is it: Quetzalcoatl agreed to Harry's unformed thought. *:What's that sign say?:*

Harry approached the sign curiously. "Those who wouldst seek an audience with Odin, thou shalt have twenty minutes from the time thy foot toucheth the stairs. Shoudst thou fail, Odin shall be closed to you forevermore.' Huh. What do you think, Quetzalcoatl?"

:We should definitely do this, but be wary of the monsters. Kill them quickly and move on.:

"Alright. Let's do this." Harry started walking up the stairs, and was almost immediately attacked by Tonberries. Harry scowled; these things were slow, but they had a ton of health and did immense damage with their knives when they got close. *Quetzalcoatl, I summon you! Finish it quickly!*

Harry faded out into a pocket dimension as Quetzalcoatl appeared, conjuring huge strikes of lightning that obviously hurt the Tonberries, but they were still coming. Returning to reality, Harry went through his spell list and selected the spell he wanted. "Tornado!" Three tornados appeared and picked up the Tonberries, hurling them within and causing them much pain, but Harry had further plans. "Firaga!" Now the tornados were enflamed, and when they finally died down, the Tonberries were dead. The enemies faded away as usual, and the Tonberries left some Chef's Knives.

Harry collected these as quickly as he could; they might be useful later in construction. "Seth, go on ahead and attack as you see fit!"

"Yes, Harry."

He continued up the stairs, evading and slaying enemies as he went. *:Only seven minutes left:* Quetzalcoatl warned as Harry reached an elevator of all things.

“Going up!” Seth joined him just as they were about to leave. When Harry reached the top, he walked out to what appeared to be the remains of the tower. There, a knight on horseback had his back turned to Harry. “I suppose you’re Odin?”

The knight turned his horse around to look at him. “I am. What may I call you?”

“My name is Harry Potter,” Harry answered. “I wish a favor.”

“An unusual name. Name this favor,” Odin said suspiciously.

“I need to get back to my world,” Harry said shortly. “It’s said that you have the capability of traveling between dimensions, and I need that power.”

“Your world it may have been once,” Odin intoned, “but what right have you to claim it now?”

“It is the place of my birth, and the place of my destiny,” Harry replied. “My bane lives there, a Lord Voldemort.”

Odin was surprised to hear the name, and toppled over his horse in surprise. To his credit, he landed on his feet. “You are *that* Harry Potter?!”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Yes, I’m *that* Harry Potter.”

“What are you doing in our world? You’re prophesied to save that one again!” Odin protested. Harry raised an eyebrow, and Odin looked a bit sheepish. “I wasn’t supposed to say that...”

“Too late now,” Harry pointed out. “Have you always just blurted stuff like that?”

Odin looked away, muttering something that Harry couldn’t quite hear, but made out the words “...stupid failing... always do this... why I never talk normally...”

“I see,” Harry said slowly. “To answer your question, I don’t know exactly why I ended up here. I ran away from my abusive relatives’

house when I was five and something strange happened. When I woke up, I was at Balamb Garden.” Shaking his head to clear it of memories, Harry turned his focus back on the present. “As I was saying, I need to get back to my world.”

Odin looked at Harry. “I do indeed carry the power and knowledge to transport you through dimensions, but rarely do I venture from my homeland.” He was obviously trying to get back into his “I’m a mighty legendary Guardian Force, respect me or else!” stride. “Your problem is bigger than you know; your scar links you and Voldemort, and it transcends all dimensional boundaries, weakening the one between this world and your own.”

“All the more reason to return to my world,” Harry said. “Can you get to the point?”

Odin looked very disgruntled. Returning to his more casual speech, he looked directly into Harry’s eyes. “In short, your world and this world’s magics are mixing. Soon portals between worlds will appear in magically-saturated areas, lasting for little more than a couple of seconds. As time goes on, however, the portals will occur more often until things calm down and the magic stabilizes. Then there will be a few permanent portals, with some random ones occurring every now and then.”

“I fail to see the bad side of this,” Harry said shortly.

“Monsters here on this world will start crossing over to yours,” Odin explained. “More wizards and witches with their own magical cores will start being born here, creating the possibility of more powerful Sorceresses, maybe a few Sorcerers as well, though they haven’t been seen in centuries... they’ll start popping up in your world as well, and Sorceresses are much more powerful than the latest Dark Lord of your world. Your world is unprepared for ours, and our problems will only be enhanced by yours.”

“Well, shit,” Harry said curtly.

“Actually, the monster problem won’t be too bad,” Odin admitted. “They’ll mostly stay around the magical areas of your world, as the non-magical areas have roads and all sorts of detection systems

basically all over the place. Monsters have a much more heightened sense of being watched; that's why they avoid the roads. Being in that world's non-magical areas would give them the constant feeling of being watched."

Harry blinked. "Are you saying that in my world, the magical population is mostly sealed off from the non-magical?"

"Correct," Odin said with a nod. "They separated themselves approximately two centuries ago during a time where witches, while heard of, were feared by everyone. Unfortunately, doing so cut them off from all the technological advancements by the non-magical society, which are quite impressive. Some of them even surpass our own."

Harry nodded slowly; this was quite a lot to take in. "Returning to the problem, how do I prevent the portals from becoming too bad?"

"Return to your world immediately," Odin said instantly. "And set up a permanent portal somewhere safe, somewhere that can't be accessed by anyone but you. If it's closed off, then you can also keep the monsters separate from the rest of the world until you can kill them. Set up the portal so it appears here on this side. By making a permanent portal, you'll draw the chaotic magic to that spot and stabilize it."

"A good plan," Harry said calmly. "But one problem with that: I don't know how to make portals, let alone permanent ones!"

"A problem easily fixed," Odin replied simply. "I have the knowledge, and the ability to implant it directly into your mind."

Harry smiled. For once, luck was in his favor. "Please go ahead then."

"I'll be using a spell from your world," Odin said casually. "It allows me to directly access your mind. Pay attention to how it feels; some who would do you harm use it freely without people knowing. *Legilimens!*"

Harry felt a mental presence intruding on his mindscape, trying to get into the fortress he had made to protect his mind. *You may just want*

to leave the knowledge outside my mind, he thought amusedly. I'll take it in for you.

Odin's assault stopped abruptly, and Harry could feel a small burden outside his mind before Odin's mental presence retreated. "Impressive, Harry," Odin congratulated. "I didn't know you knew Occlumency!"

"Occlumency?"

"Shielding the mind," Odin elaborated. "Those are some powerful shields."

"Thank you," Harry acknowledged with a bow of his head. "I created my fortress to protect my memories from Guardian Forces."

Odin rubbed his chin with a gloved hand thoughtfully. "I don't think anyone's ever tried that... but yeah, that makes sense. Anyway, the knowledge I just implanted will allow you to build your own portal. The more permanent portals you build, the more stable your world is."

Harry mentally drew in the knowledge, and promptly got a headache as his mind absorbed all the information at once. "Got it."

"Try making a temporary portal now," Odin suggested.

Harry thought about what he needed to know, and his brain promptly provided it. Frowning hard, Harry opened his arms wide. In one hand he held a Water spell, in the other a Fire spell. He also called a Thunder spell to surround him. "Earth below me, water and fire beside me, air above me, lightning around me," Harry intoned. "Let these elements of power unite, and form a portal from Centra Ruins, Terra to Privet Drive, Surrey, England, Earth!"

The Thunder, Fire and Water spells that Harry had been using suddenly shot out to a point three feet in front of him. A trickle of earth from below him shot into the mixture, and in the presence of the air flashed a bright, blinding white. When Harry opened his eyes, a purplish portal had appeared in front of him. Harry turned to face Odin. "See ya."

“Goodbye Harry, and good luck.”

With that, Harry stepped into the portal.

Dumbledore was in his office when suddenly, one of his trinkets began whirling and making loud noise. Dumbledore looked at it in deep surprise; this particular one was responsible for reporting if Harry Potter had reappeared at Privet Drive. It was one of many such trinkets, charmed to report if Harry’s magical signature appeared within a mile of any of the popular spots in London.

“*Portus*,” Dumbledore muttered, tapping his favorite tea kettle with his wand. Then he took it and disappeared. He reappeared several moments later in front of Number 4 Privet Drive.

Meanwhile, Harry looked at himself. The portal had been a long trip, so along the way, Harry had decided to let himself appear as his natural form. After all, it wouldn’t be wise to let everyone see him as a seventeen-year-old when he was only supposed to be ten. Unfortunately, his clothes were designed to be worn by adults, not almost-eleven-year-olds, but Harry thankfully had sufficient experience in his Metamorph abilities to shrink them to his size. Harry also used his Metamorph skills to change his gunblade and Seth – who preferred to stay unnoticed, waiting for an order to strike (Harry often forgot about him except in battle) – into a design on his clothing, so as not to alarm anyone by wielding a sword.

Harry looked around and sighed. *Wish I didn’t have to be here...* He suddenly felt a presence watching him. One hand automatically reaching behind him in habit of drawing his gunblade before remembering that it wasn’t there, Harry was on his guard; he had no idea who would be watching him when he’d only arrived a mere minute ago. “Who’s there?” Harry asked suspiciously, slowly turning on the spot and looking around before his scanning skills locked onto the presence from a nearby house, a house that triggered a long-forgotten memory.

That’s where that old lady with all the cats lived. She’s probably just looking at me. Harry shrugged and began walking over to where he could see a park. Sitting on the bench pensively, Harry wondered what would happen next. *I’m in this world now... I’m almost eleven...*

hmm, I suppose I should make contact with the magical aspect of the world, but the question is how? Any ideas, Quetzalcoatl?

:Hmm. I'm afraid not. You may need to talk to your relatives. They might know.:

Harry scowled. *I'd rather not, but if I must, I must.* Thankfully, he didn't have to, as Harry got the feeling of being watched again. "OK, this is getting irritating now. Come on out, whoever you are."

Dumbledore, invisible, was very surprised. Evidently Harry had better senses than his glasses suggested. "How did you know I was here?"

"I always know when others are nearby," Harry said cryptically. "Now show yourself!"

Dumbledore weighed the pros and cons, and decided that he would humor the boy for the moment. He became visible about ten feet in front of Harry, who looked a bit taken aback, to Dumbledore's mild pleasure.

Harry didn't know what he was expecting from his first wizard contact, but it was not a six-foot man with a beard nearly as long wearing light blue robes, a tall dark blue pointed hat, and a set of reading glasses. *He looks like he could have come from the fairy tale books in the school library,* Harry thought amusedly.

:Indeed.:

"So, who are you?"

Dumbledore smiled, emitting the aura of a kindly old grandfather. "My name is Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. I've been looking for you for quite a while, Harry Potter, ever since I found out you were missing."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Why? What's so special about me?"

"You, my boy, are the Boy-Who-Lived," Dumbledore said simply. "You are the only one to ever survive the unstoppable Killing Curse. You're very famous."

Harry groaned. *Why am I famous in both Terra and Earth? Why?* Quetzalcoatl merely laughed at Harry's misfortune. "I don't want fame," Harry complained, "People'll just look at me weird or expect things I can't do."

Dumbledore looked at Harry in surprise once again. He hadn't expected such a mature response from the ten-and-a-half-year-old. Little did he know that Harry was speaking from experience. Dumbledore decided to try for the sympathizing viewpoint. "Yes, I know what you mean. I, too, am rather famous for defeating a very bad man many years ago. His name was Grindelwald. To this day, people believe that I am omnipotent and omniscient."

Harry cracked a smile. *Perhaps this won't be so bad; this Dumbledore fellow seems like a guy I could get to like.*

:Do not forget, Harry, that he watched you invisibly. Few can detect anyone being that silent and invisible. He may still be untrustworthy: Quetzalcoatl warned.

Harry had learned by now that when Quetzalcoatl gave warnings like that, it was wise to listen to him. *I hear ya loud and clear. I'll keep my eye on him.* "Mr. Dumbledore, sir? No offense, but why is only a Headmaster of a school looking for me if I'm so famous?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled, practically screaming "Trust me!" "None taken, Harry," Dumbledore said genially. "There are actually many people looking for you; I merely found you first, thanks to a few magical instruments I have in my office. There is a reason why I'm famous; I'm rather good with wards and transfiguration, if I do say so myself."

Harry blinked in honest confusion. "Wards? Transfiguration?"

Dumbledore smiled benignly. "I should have known you don't know the words yet. Wards are magical spells put onto a place and are maintained. Transfiguration is the process of turning one thing into another."

"Ah."

"Your eleventh birthday is not too long from now," Dumbledore commented. "You should be receiving some mail from Hogwarts soon." *Come to think of it, Harry didn't look surprised to hear that Hogwarts was a school of witchcraft and wizardry. Does he already know about magic? Legilimens!* He looked into Harry's eyes, using Legilimency... only to be stopped by Harry's Occlumency shields. Dumbledore schooled his features to not show shock, but it was near thing.

Harry frowned, barely sensing a subtle presence in his mind. This was confirmed when Quetzalcoatl reported another mind was outside of Harry's and was trying to infiltrate Harry's mind. *:I suspect Dumbledore. Break eye contact with him.: As I thought. Dumbledore is responsible. Push him out of your mind.:*

Harry focused his mental power against the intruder and pushed hard. He felt and saw the old man's shock when he succeeded. Harry's face turned cold, and he was ready to bring his gunblade back to reality and use it. "You have no right," Harry hissed. "How dare you attack my mind!"

Dumbledore realized that he'd made a very horrible error. He decided to play it off as something to be expected. "Harry, I was merely checking to see how strong your Occlumency shields are," Dumbledore said in a pacifying tone. "There are several in our world who would take advantage of a weak mind. If you did not have these shields, I would have spent the next couple of weeks teaching you how. I am, however, surprised that you had already learned this; you have lived with Muggles – nonmagical folk – all your life, correct? They would not have been able to teach you."

Harry eyed Dumbledore suspiciously. "Do you do this with many of your students?" At the same time, he added the word Muggle to his vocabulary.

Dumbledore thought quickly, knowing that Harry would find out sooner or later that his fellow students did not know Occlumency. "No, this is a special case," he admitted. "You are quite famous, as I said. The press will be trying to get stories of you from the moment you

enter our world. The Daily Prophet, London's newspaper, tends to print the worst of people; it makes for better news. I wanted you to know Occlumency so as to protect your secrets if necessary; everyone deserves some privacy."

Harry's face appeared calm once more. The explanation made sense, he had to admit, except for one point. "Why didn't you simply ask to check them?"

Ah, an easy question! "Because in order to be truly effective, you have to be ready for random attacks, which it appears you are. Well done."

:Perhaps I was wrong: Quetzalcoatl admitted. :This Dumbledore fellow does seem to be out for your best interests.:

I dunno, Harry thought cautiously. *Something still seems a bit off. But I'll give him the benefit of the doubt.* "Thank you."

"If I may ask, where did you learn?" Dumbledore asked, his curiosity getting the best of him.

Harry saw no point in hiding the truth. "I taught myself, sir. Didn't actually know it was called Occlumency till you mentioned it; I just organized my mind so I could remember things better."

Dumbledore was yet again shocked, and it was only by sheer willpower that he managed to appear unsurprised. *Taught himself Occlumency? How long ago?* Suddenly, he noticed a barn owl approaching. He recognized it as the one he'd sent out a month ago to scour the world, seeking out the Boy-Who-Lived.

Harry noticed where Dumbledore was looking and followed his gaze. "An owl?"

"It's the way magical people send mail and news," Dumbledore answered. "Some wizards and witches keep them as pets and familiars."

The owl came closer until it was obvious he was heading to Harry. Harry awkwardly, hesitantly extended one arm out for the owl to

perch on. "For me?" The barn owl nodded and showed one talon with a rolled-up piece of what appeared to be old-style paper attached. Harry took it, but did not read it just yet. The owl didn't move. "I suppose you're waiting for a reply?" The owl nodded again. Harry looked around. "I can't exactly read the letter when you're on my arm. Why don't you perch in that tree over there while I read the letter?" The owl hesitated, then hooted and took off, perching on the branch as requested.

Harry unrolled the letter. "What kind of paper is this?" he muttered.

"It's parchment," Dumbledore replied.

"Parchment?" Harry asked, pausing in opening the letter. "That's positively medieval! Why haven't you upgraded to Muggle paper yet? It's thinner and lasts longer."

"Quills tend to tear up Muggle papers when we try to write with them," Dumbledore said simply.

"You use *quills*?" Harry asked even more incredulously. "I can see the aesthetic value, but surely Muggle pens are more efficient!"

"Muggle pens don't write well on parchment," Dumbledore stated.

Harry slapped one hand to his forehead, already getting a headache. "And why haven't you upgraded both quills and parchment to pens and paper?"

"Ah, now you're getting to the root of the problem," Dumbledore admitted. "Most of the wizarding government is made up of bureaucrats who belong to very old families that believe that Muggles are inferior. They see no reason to change the present customs."

Harry frowned. "What about wizards and witches that are children of Muggles? They would surely bring tidings of the incredible technology Muggles are making!"

"Muggle electricity and wizarding magic do not appear to mix well. Nothing that utilizes electricity works in a magic-saturated atmosphere. There has been some research here and there to allow

electricity to work, but each has been ruthlessly squashed by the pureblood supremacists.” Seeing Harry’s confused look, Dumbledore elaborated. “Some wizards and witches come from lines of all-magical people so far back that they consider themselves pure of inferior blood.”

Racism runs abundant, Harry realized grimly. “What about medicine?” he asked desperately. “Muggles have made great strides in that too!” He remembered that much from his solitary visit to the hospital when he was four when he’d broken an arm. The equipment there was very impressive, even compared to Terra’s medical supplies.

“Wizards and witches have an immense resistance to most types of major disease due to their magical core, with a few notable exceptions. Some of our healers study Muggle techniques, and a few have created spells that mimic the results.”

Thinking objectively, Harry could see why the wizards and witches had chosen to stick with their past customs. For each advancement the Muggle world made, the wizarding world either couldn’t use it or used magic to mimic it. In doing so, they began to view Muggles as inferior, and began to even reject non-electronic technology. Frowning to himself, Harry decided to do some research of his own to make electricity work in a magical environment.

Before he could do that, however, Harry had current matters to attend to. He began to read the letter, written in emerald green ink, telling him of his acceptance into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Looking at the supplies list, Harry blinked. “Just how am I supposed to get the supplies?” he inquired.

“I’ll send someone to fetch you on your birthday to show you the way,” Dumbledore promised. “Do you, perchance, remember Mrs. Figg?”

Harry thought hard. “Is she that lady who owns all those cats down the street?”

“Indeed. She knows me personally. I shall send your escort there.”

"Before you go," Harry began, "could you tell me what day it is?"

"Today is the twenty first of July," Dumbledore answered.

Ten days... "Alright, I'll be there."

Dumbledore turned to the owl. "I know you were ordered to wait for a reply, but I shall be taking it myself; Harry Potter will be attending Hogwarts."

The barn owl hooted reluctantly and took off once more. Dumbledore turned back to Harry. "Good day. I hope to see you soon in Hogwarts." Then he suddenly disappeared with a small *pop*.

Harry blinked. "He just teleported!" he breathed. "I've got to try that sometime."

:That would be an interesting and quite useful skill: Quetzalcoatl agreed.

I should probably go read up on Muggle technology, and find myself a place to sleep and eat, Harry thought to himself. Then he realized that he had no money. "Shit! Now what?"

Harry sat down heavily on the sidewalk, putting his head in his hands. After a few minutes of bouncing ideas off Quetzalcoatl, Harry came up with one option. He walked over to the house of his old minder and knocked.

"Coming!" Mrs. Figg opened up the door and was surprised to see a rather fit raven-haired boy at her door. A second glance revealed the lightning scar, the famous curse scar that identified Harry Potter. "Harry, is that you?"

Harry blinked. "How'd you know?"

"Your scar, the one on your forehead. Where have you been all these years?"

Harry felt a little foolish now; he'd completely forgotten that he'd had that since he could remember. It was rather prominent as well. Of

course she'd remember that! "Right," he said sheepishly. "Listen, I know that I've been missing for a few years now, and that's a long story, but I have a bit of a problem. The Dursleys quite likely won't accept me, and even if they did, I wouldn't stay there for all the money in the world. Dumbledore said he'd send someone to show me the way, but I need a place to stay and I don't have any money..."

He was interrupted as Mrs. Figg snorted. "Harry, do you honestly think that your parents left you nothing when they died? All your money is in Gringotts, the wizard bank. And I daresay that you won't need to work a day in your life if you didn't want to."

Harry brightened considerably at this; he was used to having enough money not to worry about overspending. Not that he'd ever consider not working for a living; he was proud of his work ethic. "This Gringotts place, is it open now?"

Mrs. Figg looked at the clock. It was getting quite late. "I'm afraid not, but I'll take you tomorrow."

Harry looked at her thankfully. "Thank you."

"No problem. Go ahead and stay here tonight." *Dumbledore probably wanted Harry to return to those wretched Dursleys.*

"You sure?" Harry asked cautiously. He was unsure of this world's customs. For all he knew, to blithely accept an invitation like that could mean loss of reputation. "I don't mean to impose..."

"Don't worry," Mrs. Figg replied, waving a hand to dismiss Harry's doubts. "Hope you don't mind sleeping on the couch, though."

"Not at all," Harry said with a small smile. *If she only knew how many times I've slept on the ground...*

"Let me just get you settled down, here." Mrs. Figg waded through her sea of cats and brought out a spare blanket, which she then put on the couch with a pillow. "Here you go. Don't mind the cats; they're harmless."

When Harry approached the cats, their eyes widened and scattered as if he was a gigantic dog. He blinked. *Wonder why that happened? Oh well, who cares?* Harry lay down on the couch, wrapped the warm blanket around him and was asleep in seconds. He'd conditioned his body to sleep whenever he had a spare opportunity. It was a much valued commodity, in Harry's life, to have a comfortable place to sleep.

Mrs. Figg watched him as Harry went to sleep, but she was troubled; very few things could scare off her beloved cats like that. Some of them were part-Kneazle, so they could immediately sense things far better than any human could. The question was, what did they see in Harry?

--

Heh heh. Those cats are very smart, aren't they? Anyway, I tried to make it realistic, because Harry hadn't been there is 6 years, his time, and even then he never really left Number 4. He has no idea about customs in this world, but he'll learn quickly. Read and review, please, and I might just post another chapter early. Heh heh.

Chapter 4: Intro to Magic 101

Harry stumbled out of the fireplace, cursing softly as he did. "Travel by fire... sure it's fast, but it's so disorienting!"

He'd been skeptical when Mrs. Figg had said that people could travel by throwing some kind of powder – *Floo powder*, Harry reminded himself – into a flame and calling out their destination. It was only when he saw Mrs. Figg do it herself that he gave it a go. To his immense surprise, the fire had been only warm, not scorching hot, as he called out "Diagon Alley!"

Mrs. Figg, who had been waiting for him, chuckled at Harry's comment. "You get used to it over time."

I'd better, Harry thought grimly, his eyes and sixth sense quickly scanning the area for danger. Finding nothing, Harry allowed Mrs. Figg to lead him to Gringotts, which was obviously a bank judging from the large amount of people coming and going at any given moment. Harry blinked several times when he saw what appeared to be a monster guarding the doors. He stiffened, pausing in his walk up the stairs to Gringotts.

"Goblin!" he hissed in recognition.

Mrs. Figg looked at him in surprise. "Yes, that is a goblin. How did you know?"

"I have met their kind before," Harry said tersely. "My experiences were... not pleasant. Are the ones here... decent?"

"Depends on your idea of decent," Mrs. Figg admitted. "Some are honorable, but some will try to steal or swindle every Knut you have."

"Knut?" Harry asked.

"Lowest unit of currency here," Mrs. Figg explained. "They're little bronze coins. Sickles are the next up, made of silver. The highest form is the Galleon, made of gold. Twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle, and seventeen Sickles to a Galleon."

"I see," Harry murmured. *Figures. The goblins in my world were rather greedy as well, those thieves have gotten a few of my Hi-Potions in the past...*

"I have no business in Gringotts," Mrs. Figg said hesitantly. "And they don't particularly like Squibs."

"Squibs?" Harry repeated faintly.

"Muggles born to wizards," Mrs. Figg clarified. "Anyway, my Floo address is simply 'Arabella Figg's residence.' Floo back if you feel like it. You're welcome anytime."

"Thank you," Harry said genuinely, watching Mrs. Figg go for a few moments before resuming his climb. As Harry approached, the goblin grew more and more fidgety, Harry noticed, as if it was fighting an internal battle: to guard Gringotts, or to flee from some terrible foe. Its eyes were quickly running along everyone, as if trying to distinguish something.

When Harry was about to pass, the goblin whirled to face him and gasped. "You!" He tapped something on his uniform, and instantly seven heavily armed goblins appeared, quickly surrounding Harry.

Harry did nothing, plastering a confused and angry look on his face. On the inside, though, Harry was fully prepared to cast Reflect and Protect. "What's going on?" he demanded.

"You are a danger to goblin society," said one of the warrior goblins. "You are under arrest."

Harry's face grew angry. "For what?"

"You know full well for what!" another warrior replied. "Need we use force, or will you come peacefully?"

"Does the name Quetzalcoatl mean anything to you?" Harry bit out in a voice that only the goblins could hear. "Because if you don't back off now, I will call him forth. And you can rest assured that if I do, not only will you die, Gringotts will collapse around your heads." He took a deep breath. "I swear to you, I mean harm to no goblin that does

not attack me. I am merely here to peacefully withdraw some funds from my vault. Nothing more.”

The goblins shifted. “Are you willing to swear a Wizard’s Oath to that effect?”

“I am unaware of the details of a Wizard’s Oath. Enlighten me?”

The goblin looked mildly surprised, but spoke anyway. “Simply swear on your life and magic that you have not come to Gringotts with intent to harm. Then to finish the oath, say ‘So mote it be.’”

Harry nodded sharply. “I, Harry James Potter, swear on my life and magic that I have not come to Gringotts with intent to harm any being. Should I find myself attacked, however, I will not hesitate to kill. So mote it be.”

There were gasps amongst the goblins as Harry stated his full name, even as his body glowed, his innate magic solidifying the oath. The goblin warriors backed away slowly to give Harry some space, but stayed in their circular format. “Now what are you doing?” Harry asked exasperatedly.

“It is easy to tell for a goblin that you have taken the strength of many beasts. They will fear you or attack you. We will surround you so as not to alarm the other goblins into attacking you. After all, we don’t want to give you a reason to attack from the inside.”

“Very well,” Harry said resignedly. “Inside, then.” He stepped through the doors, the goblins always surrounding him even as he approached a second set of double doors. Harry paused to read the inscription.

Enter, stranger, but take heed

Of what awaits the sin of greed,

For those who take, but do not earn,

Must pay most dearly in their turn.

So if you seek beneath our floors

A treasure that was never yours,

Thief, you have been warned, beware

Of finding more than treasure there.

Harry wondered for a few moments just what terrors the goblins had in store for thieves before deciding that it wasn't worth the effort to guess. He had other, more important mental problems to solve.

The one he was trying to figure out at the moment was simply how the unintelligent goblins of Terra were related to these sentient goblins of Earth. Harry decided to ask them outright. "Have you heard of a world called... Terra?" The goblins stiffened, but did not answer. "Interesting..." Taking a chance, Harry decided to ask his next question. "I wonder... was it the goblins on Earth who sent a colony to Terra, or did the goblins on Terra to get to Earth?" No response. Harry continued after a pause. "But that would require an interdimensional portal... considering that I have yet to see any of the other monsters present on Terra, you must have dismantled it. Unless, of course, you really are merely the descendants of the goblins of Terra?"

"Of course not!" one warrior blurted. "They're too stupid to be the ancestors of the great goblin race!"

Harry smiled triumphantly. "Thank you for confirming my suspicions," he said politely. *So these goblins created the portal to Terra. But, if that's true, why did the goblins of Terra degenerate into those lowly cowards?* He wanted to ask that as well, but chose not to push his luck. After all, it was highly likely he'd be forced to work with the goblins again, and he had no wish to alienate these intelligent versions. Allies were always helpful, and he was still unfamiliar with this world.

Harry and his guard walked through the second set of double doors and entered the main hall, which was bustling with activity. Harry, not wanting to reveal who he was to the entire crowd – the Scan *had* told him that he was famous, and Harry didn't want to be seen with a

large escort of warrior goblins – used his Metamorphic abilities to transform into a tall, imposing man with short sandy-blond hair and brown eyes. As expected, all eyes turned to him as he strolled confidently through the masses, reaching the goblin that appeared to be the one directing the flow of traffic to different places, but mostly to one area where a tunnel began.

“I’d like to make a withdrawal,” Harry said in a low voice.

The goblin looked up and apparently for the first time sensed the power behind Harry’s exterior. “Name and key, sir?” he asked almost timidly.

Harry leaned in close. “Harry Potter. I’m afraid I don’t have my key, since I’ve been missing for, what is it, almost six years?”

The goblin almost fainted. This, this... immensely powerful being was not only strong magic-wise, but politically as well. Then he realized that this was an opportunity to get on his good side. “That is not a problem, Mr. Potter,” the goblin whispered back so only he and Harry could hear. “Gringotts can make you another key and invalidate all previous keys if you wish. All we need is a sample of blood at the Key Registration counter to your right.”

Harry smiled at the goblin. “Thank you.” He turned and walked to the Key Registration counter, his goblin guards following him. “Hello, sir, I need to make a key to my vault.”

The goblin to whom Harry was talking nodded swiftly, fearing the wrath of this beast-slayer and he was uncertain that the guards could contain him. “I will need a sample of blood,” he murmured hesitantly, holding up a ceremonial dagger and an odd-colored parchment.

“Very well.” Harry offered up his left palm, and the goblin quickly made a shallow cut for a few drops of blood to seep onto the parchment. The blood instantly was absorbed into the parchment, and writing began to appear in Harry’s blood. Glancing at his hand, Harry noticed that he was already healed, probably by the magic of the ceremonial dagger. Then he read the writing.

Harry James Potter – Age 10 years, 11 months.

Son of James & Lily Potter

Head of Potter House

Vaults owned:

Potter Family Vault - 23

Potter Trust Vault – 687

Note: Harry Potter's Trust Vault Key is being held by Albus Dumbledore until he returns to the magical world.

Note: Potter Family Vault is being held until Harry Potter comes of age.

Harry nodded, pleased to see the efficiency of the magic test. "What is the age of majority?"

"Seventeen," the goblin answered, relaxing slightly as he felt Harry's calm exuding from him.

"I see. As I said before, I would like a key made. Please invalidate the one in Dumbledore's possession."

"Of course. One moment please." The goblin went into the backroom and returned a few moments later. "Here you are, Mr. Potter."

"Thank you," Harry said, nodding slightly at the goblin, who returned the gesture. Harry then made his way back to the goblin who'd directed him to the Key Registration office, who smiled toothily as Harry presented his new key.

"Griphook will take you to your vault. Griphook!"

Another goblin, Griphook presumably, walked forward and led Harry to an old mining cart. What followed was an exhilarating ride for Harry as the mining cart reached incredible speeds.

"Why didn't the guards follow?" he asked loud enough for Griphook to hear.

Griphook grinned at him. "If you kill me down here, there's no way for you to return on your own," he replied. "These caverns go for miles and have so many twists and turns that you'd spend all your life trying to get out."

Oh. Makes sense, Harry admitted, just as they arrived at Vault 687. He stepped out of the cart with Griphook, who took Harry's key and opened the door. Inside, Harry's jaw dropped to see large piles of gold, silver and bronze. *I've got all the money I'm going to need*, Harry thought to himself in satisfaction. But there was one thing troubling him.

"Griphook, I know that you can sense all the strength I've acquired by killing various monsters," Harry began, "but why did the goblins surround and attack me like that? I haven't done anything to the goblins on this world, and you guys are definitely much more intelligent than the ones on Terra."

Griphook gasped. "You are from Terra?"

"Yes," Harry answered, slightly confused at the shocked tone. "Or rather, I somehow transported myself there when I was five on a solar eclipse."

"That explains a lot," Griphook muttered.

"You mean the monster strength thing?" Harry asked.

"Yes. The answer to your original question, though, is a lengthy one." Griphook sighed. "The unfortunate fact of the matter is that our killers gain a portion of our strength and magic. We know little about Terra, aside from the fact that we sent in an expedition to explore it. When we checked on them a year later, they had degenerated into mindless killers. We then destroyed the interdimensional portal. Wizards have yet to make an interdimensional portal, despite the occasional try here and there. So, we were unaware that you had recently returned from Terra, let alone ever having been there.

"Throughout history, we goblins have rebelled against the wizarding governments for better rights, to be viewed equal with the wizards. Generally, we failed, but our prime achievement was acquiring the

right to operate banks across the world, creating a monopoly on the finances of wizards. We work together grudgingly. Furthermore, some wizards despise us, seeing us as lower beings, and thus have no qualms with killing goblins. When we sensed the immense strength you had received from the 'monsters' you killed, the only available explanation was that you were a butcher of goblins.

"We goblins have a plan in such cases; all the goblins that associate with wizards on the surface carry a means of alerting our elite to make a preeminent strike to preserve our society," Griphook finished. "We are not very numerous, so we must do what we can to survive."

Harry was surprised and pleased at the honest, thorough answer. "In Terra, all the monsters have the same traits you described in the Terran goblins. They are mindless, ruthless killers, for the most part. I'm not exaggerating; I have the scars to prove it. I have killed them and taken their strength to grow stronger. It was necessary to survive. But I don't want this animosity between myself and the goblins as a race. Do you know of any way for me to fix this?"

Griphook frowned. "Let me think on this for a few minutes." Harry shrugged and began packing his Item bag with one hundred of each kind of coin. When Harry returned to the cart, Griphook looked at him. "To simply explain this to the Goblin High Elders is not enough; few will believe you. Even swearing an oath or the sacred Unbreakable Vow would not persuade many; they will simply think that you will get around it in other ways. I can think of no way. My sincerest apologies."

Harry sighed. "Oh well. I understand your race's point of view, but I was merely doing what I had to in order to survive." A thought suddenly struck, and Harry was ashamed to have not thought of it before. "No offense, but why are you answering my questions, and so politely? The others treated me as if I were scum."

Griphook looked at Harry piercingly. "Have you lied to me at all about what you have told me so far?"

"No," Harry asserted firmly without hesitation.

“Do you see goblins, or any other intelligent species for that matter, as inferior simply because they’re a different race than you?”

“No.”

“Then you’re better than most wizards,” Griphook concluded. “And as such, I will treat you with the respect you have thus earned.”

Harry felt a rush of pride; he’d made his first genuine ally, if not yet a friend, in this strange, unfamiliar world. Things were looking up.

Perhaps it was fate, perhaps it was merely coincidence, but Severus Snape was in Diagon Alley that day to restock his Potions stores for the upcoming year at Hogwarts. Teaching Potions required that he have plenty of spare ingredients, and the bumbling idiots who attempted to make potions sometimes ran out mid-year. Others, Snape knew, had a talent for Potions and actually made some on their spare time, and thus needed the spare ingredients Snape provided. This select group was mostly Slytherins, of course, though the occasional Ravenclaw showed enough aptitude to earn Snape’s assistance.

Harry, in the meantime, had left Gringotts and its guards behind, morphing back into his natural self. After all, he needed to buy first-year supplies, and looking like a full-grown adult while doing so would give away the game. He spotted an Apothecary, and walked in.

Harry looked around; there were ingredients on every shelf, dozens of jars. He gulped softly and took another glance at his list; it said the standard Potions Kit. Not knowing what that entailed, he walked over to the clerk. “Sir, I need a standard Potions Kit for my first year in Hogwarts. I was wondering if you could tell me what inside?”

Snape froze from his inspection of the ingredients. He knew that voice, but it couldn’t be! James Potter had been dead for almost ten years now. And even if he were alive, why did he sound so young? *There’s only one explanation for it.* He turned around and his fears were confirmed. Young, with long black hair tied back in a ponytail, with facial features almost identical to James Potter’s, yet his eyes were Lily’s... *It has to be Harry Potter.*

The clerk smiled and nodded, pulling out a case from a shelf behind him and opening it up. "This is the standard Potions Kit. It has salamander eyes, newt eyes, frog legs, dragon liver, phoenix tears, flobberworm skin, Mediterranean seaweed, crow hearts, petrified oak wood, bezoars, monkshood, snake fangs, porcupine quills, horned slugs, dried nettles, wormwood, root of asphodel, cobra venom, snake fangs, crow feathers, spider legs, lacewing flies, beetle eyes, knotgrass, powdered unicorn horn, leeches, and fluxweed here. Now, you're probably not going to use all this in your first year, but it's best to be prepared; after all, you may find yourself needing to make a more difficult potion than you're expecting."

Snape smiled maliciously but kept his silence. If Potter was going to be in the next batch of first years, then the clerk would be proven right. The young Potter would pay for what his father had treated him. Looking at the victim in question, he was surprised to see that Harry was paying close attention to which ingredients were which. The older Potter had very little talent in Potions, but Lily had been on par with Snape himself. Perhaps this snot-nosed brat had some of her talent. It would be interesting to see how the last Potter stood up in Snape's torture – *I mean, classes.*

"Thank you," Harry said politely. He'd have to look up what all these were.

"Don't go making potions without adult supervision, you hear me?" the clerk warned. "Botched potions can be really dangerous."

"Understood," Harry agreed, nodding emphatically; he had no idea how to make potions, and he had no wish for anything untoward to happen to him. "Is there a book or something that would help me understand the properties of ingredients?"

Snape's eyebrow rose as he contemplated the significance of Potter's question. It suggested an interest in the subtle art of Potions. He sneered. *As much as it might be a waste of talent, I shall eliminate that interest to make him miserable, just as his father did to me.*

"Sure, but I think it's already on your booklist. *1000 Magical Herbs and Fungi*. You can find it in Flourish and Blott's across the street."

“Again, thank you.” Harry nodded at the clerk and took his leave of the shop after paying for the kit.

Snape watched him as he left, with one eyebrow raised. *Polite for a brat, that much I’ll give him.* His sneer grew as he imagined how he would infuriate the boy in class with his Legilimency.

Harry mentally kept a close watch on the sense of being watched. It had been with him throughout his time in the Apothecary, and it disturbed him that someone had shown such interest in him. He frowned and shrugged. *What will come will come.*

Harry stopped by the Cauldron shop and bought a collapsible brass telescope, a nice set of scales for measuring potions ingredients, and a collapsible pewter cauldron, which he then used to hold onto his books when he visited Flourish and Blotts. He decided to get more than what the book list had ordered, getting all seven books of Miranda Goshawk’s *Standard Book of Spells* series. Then he also decided to pick up a copy of *Curses and Countercurses* by Professor Vindictus Veridian, reasoning that he should know at least a few pieces of battle magic from this world to defend himself without giving himself away; he still felt the need to hide where he’d been for the last six years. But after a moment’s consideration, he decided to end his spending there; he didn’t know how much more getting a wand or his clothes would cost, and getting much more would attract attention.

Next, he arrived at Madame Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions where Madame Malkin, a squat smiling witch dressed in mauve, was waiting out front. “Hogwarts, dear? Got the lot here – another young man being fitted up just now, in fact.” She led Harry to the back, where another witch was already working with someone, *a fellow first year from the looks of it*, Harry judged. The boy had platinum blond hair slicked back, and his skin was very pale. *Hasn’t seen much sunlight, eh? Suggests that he doesn’t do much work. Wonder if there are wizarding forms of servants?*

The boy spotted him as Malkin stood Harry up on a stool and began to take some measurements. “Hello. Hogwarts, too?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed with a nod. “First year for you as well?”

"Yes," the boy said with a smirk. "My father's next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands. Then I'm going to drag them off to look at racing brooms, I don't see why first years can't have their own. I think I'll bully father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow."

Harry noted that the boy had a low, drawling way of speaking, almost as if he were speaking condescendingly. Harry frowned, being strongly reminded of Seifer.

"Do you have your own broom?" the boy went on.

"No," Harry answered.

"Play Quidditch at all?"

Harry frowned, quickly searching his mind for any references to Quidditch. The way the boy said it, it sounded like a sport, and the context suggested that it was played on brooms. So he could safely say that no, he hadn't. "No."

"I do," the boy said arrogantly, "and Father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to play for my house, and I must say, I agree." Harry was almost seeing Seifer's outline behind the boy, it was so creepy to hear him talking like that. "Know what house you'll be in yet?"

Ah! Something that I know about! Harry had taken a few extra minutes with Griphook in Gringotts to learn a little bit about how Hogwarts worked. Since goblins didn't attend Hogwarts, he didn't know too much, but had told Harry that Hogwarts was separated into four houses – Hufflepuff for the incredibly loyal and hardworking, Gryffindor for the exceedingly brave, Ravenclaw for the exceptionally intelligent, and Slytherin for the cunning and ambitious.

"Quite stupid, really, in my opinion," Griphook had remarked. "In the past, before the most recent Dark Lord, the Houses got along pretty well and had some friendly competition, but ever since Lord Voldemort came into power, Slytherin has gotten a particularly bad reputation, since Voldemort was in Slytherin. As a result, the discrimination against Slytherins forced several of its members to join Voldemort simply for the opportunity to be held equal to the others.

It's only gotten worse since then, and the prime rivalry in the school is Gryffindor versus Slytherin."

So, Harry didn't know which he would be. He was very hardworking, evidenced by the fact that he worked very hard to get where he was at the moment. He was also intelligent, proven by completing his quest for Odin. Harry's bravery was shown through his determination to fight even against very powerful monsters that were his equal or better, and his cunning though successfully guarding his secrets. "I dunno, but I'd like to think that I'd do well in any of the houses," Harry said diplomatically.

"Well, no one really knows until they get there, do they, but I know I'll be Slytherin, all our family has been – imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I'd leave, wouldn't you?"

"No," Harry said stoically. "Hufflepuff is known for the loyal and hardworking, and that's not a bad thing."

The boy sneered. "My family's motto is 'A Malfoy bows to no one.' None of us are Hufflepuffs, because we don't want to be followers, we are the leaders!"

"What about loyalty to family?" Harry challenged. "And aren't you a follower of your family's code? Who's to say you aren't a good Hufflepuff?" The young Malfoy looked quite taken aback, having not thought of that. But before he could come up with a retort, Harry decided to continue. "And what about Gryffindor? It takes some guts to try and circumvent school regulations, yet you were thinking of doing just that a minute ago." Malfoy looked rather pained at the thought. "And Ravenclaw! Surely brains are just as desirable in your family as cunning! You could be any of the Houses, if you think about it. As you said, 'no one really knows until they get there.'"

"Quite right," Madame Malkin commented.

Malfoy, unable to come up with a decently intelligent reply to Harry's argument, decided to change the subject. "What's your name?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Who's asking?"

“I’m Malfoy, Draco Malfoy,” the boy said pompously.

Harry smirked. “Potter, Harry Potter.”

Malfoy’s jaw dropped just as Malkin announced, “That’s you done, my dear.”

Harry smiled. “Thank you, Madame Malkin,” he said with small bow as he took his leave. “Perhaps we can continue this conversation later, Draco Malfoy.”

Harry then went to a miscellaneous shop and bought plenty of parchment, quills, and inks of different colors. After that, he stopped for lunch, treating himself to a bit of ice cream; after all, it was a hot day, and he’d been doing a lot of walking and spending. He promised himself to work off the extra sugar later.

Glancing at the list once more, Harry decided to visit the Magical Menagerie to pick up an owl. Toads seemed useless and cats simply didn’t appeal to Harry – probably an aftereffect of spending so much time at Mrs. Figg’s, Harry reasoned. Owls, on the other hand, appeared to be very useful. Looking around, he saw a beautiful white snowy owl that caught his eye. Approaching, Harry slowly lifted one hand and stroked her chest feathers. “You’re beautiful, you know that?” he whispered. The owl hooted softly under Harry’s caresses.

“Amazing,” the shopkeeper said. “I never thought I’d sell her; she’s always had a vicious temper to anyone who dared approach her. It’s as if she’s been waiting for you.”

Harry smiled. “I wouldn’t doubt it,” he said. “Remember that anything’s possible with magic.” He turned back to the snowy owl. “So, you wanna come with me?”

The snowy owl hooted a definite affirmative, spread her wings and took flight for a brief moment, perching on the arm Harry outstretched for her. “I’ll take her,” Harry told the shopkeeper, looking at the shelves behind him as well. “I’ll also take three boxes of owl treats, and this cage here.”

After paying for his purchases, Harry opened the cage for the snowy owl, who hopped in and put her head under one wing. Not knowing anything about that sort of behavior, Harry glanced at the shopkeeper. "She's asleep," the shopkeeper stated simply. "That's what birds do when they sleep."

"Oh. Thank you." Harry picked up the cage and placed the treats in his Item bag. Then he left and made his way to his final destination: the wand shop. Politely asking a passerby where the wand shop was, he was directed to Ollivanders. It was a narrow, shabby shop, Harry noticed, with peeling letters that read "Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C."

Harry knew better, however, than to judge a book by its cover, or in this case, a shop by its appearance. He stepped in cautiously, causing a small bell to ring somewhere in the shop. Harry could sense the secretive, powerful magic residing in this tiny area. Thousands of narrow boxes – *wands*, Harry assumed – were piled neatly all the way up to the ceiling.

Harry sensed someone sneaking up on him, and whirled, ready to cast Reflect. An old man looked rather surprised, his pale silvery eyes widened. "It has been a long time since someone has caught me like that," Ollivander said in surprise. Harry felt a brief touch on his mind, and Ollivander's expression became even more surprised. "And it has been even longer since a boy of eleven knew the art of Occlumency. Who might you be?" He looked at Harry closely before his eyes widened in recognition. "Harry Potter. You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday she came in for her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches, swishy, made of willow. Good for Charms work. Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable, with a bit more power, makes it perfect for transfiguration. Well, rather, it's the wand that chooses the wizard, really."

He leaned even closer extending one narrow finger, but Harry knew that Mr. Ollivander meant no harm. "And that's where..." Ollivander touched Harry's lightning scar. "Yes, I'm sorry to say I sold the wand that did it. Thirteen and a half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands... if I'd known what that wand was

going out into the world to do..." He shook his head. "Enough of those old times. You are here for a wand, are you not?"

"I am."

"Which is your wand arm?"

Harry blinked. *He must mean which arm I plan to use my wand with.* "Left, but does it really matter?"

"Actually not really," Ollivander admitted. "Hold out your arm, then. That's it." He measured Harry from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit and round his head. As he measured, he said "Every Ollivander wand has a core of a powerful magical substance, Mr. Potter. We use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of dragons. No two wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons, or phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."

"You mean if I needed to, I could use someone else's wand?" Harry asked curiously.

"Yes, but since it would not be attuned to your magic, it would be harder to cast spells with it," Ollivander answered from the shelves, taking down boxes. Suddenly Harry realized that the tape measure was now measuring on its own. *When did that happen?*

:A few seconds after he began the measuring.:

"That will do," he said, and the tape measure crumpled into a heap on the floor. "Right then, Mr. Potter. Try this one. Beachwood and dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave."

Harry blinked, and feeling quite foolish, waved the wand a little, but Mr. Ollivander snatched it out of his hand almost at once. Several wands later, Mr. Ollivander was getting excited, and Harry still had no idea what Ollivander was waiting for. After another fifteen or so wands, Mr. Ollivander seemed almost giddy.

“Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, we’ll find the perfect match around here somewhere – I wonder, now – yes, why not – unusual combination – holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple.”

Harry took the wand and suddenly felt his magical core surge to life. Taking it authoritatively, Harry raised it up above his head and swished it down through the air. From the wand emerged a large silvery shape that took flight and circled around his head, singing a beautifully heartwarming song before fading away.

Ollivander’s mouth had dropped. “I have never, and I mean never in my exceedingly long life, seen that. I think it is safe to say, Mr. Potter, that you are meant for great things.”

“What was that?” Harry asked with a smile; the song had lifted his spirits considerably, and he felt newly complete in a way.

“A phoenix,” Ollivander whispered. “Immensely powerful birds of elemental fire whose song bolsters those who support the Light, and strikes fear into the hearts of the Dark. To have conjured even an incomplete phoenix is quite impressive, and you have not even entered Hogwarts yet... and that wand, as well...”

“What’s so special about this wand?”

Ollivander peered at Harry piercingly. “The phoenix who gave the feather used in that wand donated only one other.”

“One other?” Harry echoed.

“Indeed. It is interesting that you should be destined for this wand, when it’s brother, why, it’s brother is the one that gave you that scar,” Ollivander said pointing at Harry’s lightning scar.

Harry’s eyes widened. “Are you saying that Voldemort has the brother wand to this one? What does that mean?”

Ollivander looked at Harry’s new wand pensively. “If your wand and his ever should meet, I believe it shall be interesting to see the effects.”

“How often do you sell brother wands in the same lifetime?” Harry questioned.

Ollivander ignored the question. “That’ll be seven Galleons.”

Sighing, but knowing that Ollivander would not answer his question, Harry reached into his Item bag and pulled out the seven Galleons, paying the old man. “Is there a holster or anything for my wand?” Harry asked. “I don’t want to accidentally break it or anything.”

Ollivander’s eyes lit up. “Ah, I think I have exactly what you’re looking for.” He went behind some shelves and reappeared a few moments later. “One wand holster, and a wand servicing kit.”

Harry nodded. “How does the holster work?”

“Raise your sleeve,” Ollivander ordered. When Harry complied, he whistled. “Beautiful snake, there.”

“Thank you,”Seth replied. Harry relayed the message, and Ollivander’s eyes widened further.

“You’re a Parselmouth? How interesting...” Ollivander quickly strapped on the holster and put in Harry’s wand. “Returning to the holster, it’s enchanted with a specialized Summoning Charm so if you twist your wrist in a certain way” – he demonstrated – “your wand will appear in your hand. When your wand’s in your holster, the Disarming Charm has no effect, and the holster’s also enchanted to withstand being summoned.”

“Excellent,” Harry said pleased. “I’ll take them!”

Very happy with his new purchases, Harry wandered around Diagon Alley for a few minutes, looking at the various shops. He passed one with a crowd, where people were whispering in awe at what appeared to be a broom.

“A Nimbus 2000!”

“Fastest yet, you know.”

"I'd give my left hand to ride one of those!"

Harry chuckled; apparently the Muggles had gotten something right; witches and wizards did ride brooms. Continuing on, Harry eventually asked someone about an inn, and the old witch he'd asked kindly led him to a brick wall. "The Leaky Cauldron's just beyond this wall. You have to tap these bricks with your wand in order to get inside," she explained. "Pay close attention."

Harry did and put the bricks to memory before walking in. The barkeeper noticed him after a few moments. "Hey there lad, what can I do for ya? Name's Tom."

"Harry," Harry replied. "I'd like to rent a room for the next eight days."

Tom nodded. "I can do that, but first I'd like to speak to your parents, if they're available?"

Harry knew that it was a reasonable request, but unfortunately one that he couldn't grant. He looked down. "They're dead."

"Oh dear, I've really put my foot in it this time, haven't I?" Tom asked. Harry didn't quite understand what he'd said, but got the gist of it; Tom was embarrassed that he'd unwittingly brought up a painful subject. "What about any guardians?"

"Haven't got any, or at least, none I'd like to speak of," Harry explained. *The Dursleys can go rot in hell.*

"I see," Tom said slowly. "Well, I suppose I can get you your room, but I'll need your full name."

Harry bit his lip. *Here's to hoping that he treats me normally.* "Harry Potter."

Tom's eyes widened. "Bless my soul... I never thought that I'd be renting out a room to *the* Harry Potter," he whispered in low tones to not be heard by anyone else.

Harry sighed. "Listen, I'm just Harry, ok? I'm nothing special."

:I beg to differ.:

Quetzalcoatl, shut up. Now's not the time. I'm special on Terra, but I'm new and inexperienced here. "So, how much for the room?" Harry asked.

"Three Sickles a night."

"And breakfast?"

"An extra Sickle."

"Alright. I'll pay in advance. Four Sickles for bed and breakfast for eight days is thirty-two Sickles, which is one Galleon and 15 Sickles." Harry pulled out the money required and handed it to Tom, who took it and recorded his name.

"Your room is number 4," Tom said, getting a key off the wall and handing it to Harry. "It's just upstairs."

"Thank you."

Harry walked upstairs, sat down in a comfortable reading chair, and pulled out *Theory of Magic*, by Estaban Studius. He still had a good three or four hours before dinner, so he made it quite a ways through it, especially since his Occlumency helped him retain the information.

"Interesting..." Harry murmured as he read through the small pieces of magical theory explained in it. According to the book, doing magic required only two things: will and sheer magical power. Since upset children often focused entirely on what they wanted, accidental magic happened. Sometimes the magic also acted on its own to save the life of its user, but that was uncommon. Wands were foci, simply amplifying the strength of the magic and giving it an exit. Most wizards needed wands to amplify their strength enough to cast the more difficult spells. Finally, studies showed that certain wand movements helped mold magic, easing the amount of willpower necessary to cast a spell. Theoretically, if a wizard had enough magical power and will, they could cast wandless spells. However, the only one known to do that on purpose in today's society was

Albus Dumbledore, and even he could only do simple tasks wandlessly.

Harry smirked to himself. *Quetzalcoatl, I think we just found our project for the next year.*

:Are you certain that you have enough willpower?:

We'll find out, won't we?

Harry glanced at his watch; it was time for dinner. Going downstairs for a brief dinner, he talked with Tom avidly about his recent discovery. "... so maybe I can do wandless magic when I grow older!" Harry said excitedly.

"I wouldn't try," Tom cautioned. "Some who have tried ended up in Saint Mungo's, our hospital, because they used up all their magic. It's known as EME, Extreme Magical Exhaustion."

Harry frowned. "How would I build my magical reserves?"

"Simply through the act of casting magic," Tom said. "Preferably if you cast difficult ones often."

Harry hid a grin; he'd been casting Advanced-level magic on Terra for years. Then again, on the other hand, he hadn't been casting from his own core, he'd been drawing and storing magic. So he didn't know if that counted.

:Actually: Quetzalcoatl began, :you've been stocking thousands of spells. Maintaining all that in your magical core forced it to grow, which caused those occasional pains you felt over the years. So, the odds are you're more than strong enough for wandless magic. But before doing that, I recommend actually learning to cast with a wand. Besides, the magical theory said that using a wand enhanced a spell's strength.:

Right. Thanks.

:That's what I'm here for.:

Harry and Tom spent the rest of dinner chatting amiably, and Tom, with a smile, explained Quidditch to Harry. After he was done, Harry returned to his room and read late into the night. Finally, the following morning, Harry decided to name his new snowy owl Hedwig, because of the interesting character of Hedwig in one of his history books. Hedwig and Seth hit it off rather well, despite the fact that owls generally ate snakes.

Harry spent the next seven days studying his spells and practicing them, occasionally leaving the Leaky Cauldron to explore Diagon Alley. Thus far, Harry had mastered *Lumos* and its counterpart *Nox*, which lit up and dimmed his wand respectively. He was also proficient in the Jelly-Legs Jinx, the Levitation Charm, (*Wingardium Leviosa*), a spell for transport (*Locomotor* plus item) the Leg-Locker Curse (*Locomotor Mortis*), the Full Body-Bind (*Petrificus Totalus*), the Tickling Charm (*Rictusempra*), the Repairing Charm (*Reparo*), a mild blasting charm (*Flipendo*) the Unlocking Charm (*Alohamora*), and the Dancing Jinx (*Tarantallegra*). These were merely the more useful spells, in Harry's opinion; there were others that seemed close to useless except as a basis to work off of. That was the result of studying the first two books of *The Standard Book of Spells*, while *Curses and Countercurses* primarily held more material designed for pranksters.

This fact had brought forth a side of Harry that not even he had known about. He felt strangely excited by the idea of pranking. It was an opportunity to have fun, which he had to admit he'd had little of without being poked and prodded by his friends. At the same time, he could practice his spellwork. "I'm almost bloody eleven years old, Harry told Seth, "and I'm plenty strong enough to defend myself if need be. I want the childhood I denied myself."

"Good!" Seth said, pleased. "Finally, you see what your friends have been telling you all along; you need to relax and enjoy life! Otherwise, what's the point of living?"

:I agree.:

Harry smiled. *"Then let's have fun pranking the hell out of Hogwarts!"*

Back in an old stone castle adopted for educational purposes, all the teachers shivered simultaneously in the Great Hall. Snape felt it the worst. *It's that feeling, Snape realized, that horrible sense of impending doom that always haunted me whenever I was about to be victim to one of Potter's pranks.*

"A bad omen," Professor Trelawney, the batty old Divination teacher, whispered. For once, no one disagreed with the fraud.

At a shabby old house held up purely by magic, a pair of redheaded twins looked at each other in confusion; they could sense that a balance concerning them had been shifted, somehow, but what balance, and in whose favor?

One twin shrugged at the other. "We'll find out..."

"... sooner or later," the other finished.

It was Harry's birthday. He had decided to meet whoever Dumbledore was planning on guiding him through Diagon Alley, just in case he – *or she*, Harry reminded himself – had something to show that Harry had missed. So, with Tom's permission, he used the Floo to Mrs. Figg's house.

"Hello?" he called out.

"Harry, is that you?" Mrs. Figg's voice called out from the kitchen.

"Yeah. Mind if I wait here for the escort person?"

"Not at all!"

Harry made himself comfortable on the couch, and once again noticed how the cats scattered when he approached. It was almost as if they were afraid of him or something. He shrugged it off; maybe they smelled something on him, or maybe they were simply very shy around him. In any case, it didn't concern him.

Severus Snape was not a happy man. In fact, his reputation preceded him as the grouchiest, most bitter Professor at Hogwarts. His sole relief lay in his Potions. Right now, though, he was unhappier

than usual, because it was his job to escort the Potter brat through Diagon Alley and help him gather his school supplies.

Flashback

"You called me, Headmaster?" Snape asked.

"Yes," Dumbledore replied. "As you already know, Harry Potter has returned to our world by means unknown. He has no knowledge of the wizarding world, and as such, needs a guide through Diagon Alley."

Snape was not a Slytherin for naught, however. "No. I will not be the one to guide Potter. Besides," he said, clutching onto one of his memories, "I saw him at the Diagon Alley Apothecary a week ago."

"Really?" Dumbledore asked, eyes twinkling in a benign manner. "How interesting. Perhaps old Arabella was simply asking him to pick up some ingredients for potions?"

"Possibly," Snape conceded. "But Potter also bought a first year's Potion Kit."

Dumbledore shrugged. "Why visit the same place twice for potions ingredients when you can do it in one trip? Arabella probably gave him enough money to buy it. Who knows? Perhaps she decided to tutor Harry a little in the art of potions before term."

Snape could find little argument in that. "Nevertheless, why must it be me? Surely Minerva or Filius could do a better job. Merlin's beard, Albus, even that half-giant Hagrid could connect to the Potter scion better than I. Do not ask this of me; there is too much history with the Potter name. It is enough that I have to teach the brat."

"He may be James's son, Severus, but he is also the son of Lily," Dumbledore gently reminded Snape.

"I have seen him!" Severus insisted. "The only thing he got from Lily was her eyes, and God willing, a piece of her intelligence! Nothing more! He is as arrogant as his father!"

"You say that, yet you have seen him but once," Dumbledore pointed out. "Are you and James so very different if you each judge the other without evidence?"

Snape growled. "That was low, Albus. Fine. I'll do it."

End Flashback

"What was Albus thinking?" Severus muttered to himself as he approached the end to the Anti-Apparition wards of Hogwarts. He continued to grumble as he made sure he had everything he needed, secretly hoping he had for once forgotten something so as to delay this trip, but finding that he had everything. Snape took a deep breath, steeling himself for the inevitable confrontation. Then, with a *pop*, he Disapparated.

It was incredibly rude to directly Apparate into someone's house – it was the equivalent of breaking down the door. Thus, few did it. It was simply one of those customs that people followed unless necessary. Snape, however, was in a hurry, and did not want to be sidetracked by Muggles or delayed by a simple door. So, he Apparated into Arabella Figg's living room.

Chaos erupted.

A cat screeched because Snape landed on its tail, Harry yelped in surprise, Mrs. Figg ran out with a washing iron to investigate, Snape tripped on the cat he was on, fell on more cats... you get the idea. By the end of it all, only Harry had avoided being scratched or clawed by the many cats. No one knew exactly how, as Snape had been throwing cats off of him left and right, using a wand when he could. Even Mrs. Figg had caught a few scratches, and she was their owner!

Suffice to say, Snape was looking like a bloody mess of scratches across his face, legs and arms. Cursing like a sailor, Snape ran his wand across his wounds. Harry watched in fascination as the wounds healed as the wand ran across them. Once Snape had gotten the majority of them, he looked at Harry with a frustrated expression. "Potter, I assume?"

“Yes, sir,” Harry said politely. “If I may ask, what was that spell you just used? It looks awfully handy.”

Snape glared at Harry. *Stop delaying this, Potter!* “For your information, that spell’s incantation is *Episkey*, and it’ll heal small cuts and bruises. Now let’s get going, and no more questions unless asked; I have no desire to spend more time than necessary on this outing.” Harry nodded, knowing when to choose his battles. “I assume you know how to use the Floo Network?” Another nod. “Good. We’re going to Diagon Alley.”

Snape waved Harry into the fireplace, and Harry threw down the Floo powder. “Diagon Alley!”

Harry stumbled through the fireplaces, and was practically launched from the Floo gate. He shook his head. *I’ve GOT to learn how to land safely.* Noticing a small feeling of blood on his left cheek from where he had accidentally scraped it on the road, Harry decided to try out the new spell. “*Episkey*,” he whispered, running his wand tip over the cut on his face. The skin sealed itself, and Harry wiped away the excess blood. It felt a little like the standard Cure spell, only more specialized for cuts. *Interesting...*

Harry heard a *pop* and Snape appeared beside him. “Good, you’re here. Come. We’re going to Gringotts.” They walked on, Snape’s robes billowing behind him eerily.

Harry decided to chance something; after all, this man had said that he wanted to spend as small amount of time here as possible. “Sir? I’ve already visited Gringotts and got some money, if that’s the purpose of our trip there.”

Snape whirled around. “Have you already gotten all your supplies for Hogwarts?” he demanded.

“Yes,” Harry said honestly.

Harry watched as the man’s face turned angry. “So why did you waste my time?” he hissed dangerously.

Ok, that's it. I've tried to be polite, but this guy's just ASKING for it. Harry's face turned cold, and his eyes hardened into cool jade. "Listen, buddy, I don't know you, but you're sure as hell starting to piss me off! And trust me, you won't like me when I'm angry."

Snape did the worst thing possible then. He sneered. "What could you do? You're only eleven, and not even in Hogwarts yet!"

"You asked for it!" Harry thrust his left arm forward, using his right to pull up his sleeve to reveal a snake tattoo. "Seth, come forth!" Thankfully, saying that was merely a short, nearly inaudible hiss, so his Parselmouth abilities were still hidden. At the same time, he used his Metamorph abilities to bring Seth back into existence. In essence, it looked as if he'd been magically concealing Seth under his shirt.

Seth leapt out from Harry's arm, landing on the pavement in front of Harry while flaring his hood and fangs. "Who dares attack my friend Harry?!"

Careful to focus on the English language, Harry answered. "Just wait, Seth. I promise you if this guy doesn't get his beak of a nose out of our hair now, you'll have an early supper." Then he flicked his wrist and his wand flew out into his hand. "Leave now, or face our combined wrath."

Snape laughed disdainfully. "You cannot hope to match me! *Evanesco.*"

Seth dodged easily, having grown very fast and strong from facing monsters. "Is that the best you've got, human?" he taunted, not that Snape could understand.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "You've attacked my friend, stranger. *Petrificus Totalus.*"

Snape silently made a shield, and Harry's Body-Bind bounced away. Then a sudden bite shocked him. Looking down, he saw Potter's snake slithering away. He could feel his body slowing down, for some reason. He couldn't raise his arm as fast as he could before! *This is not good...*

Harry smirked. "*Petrificus Totalus*," he repeated, followed closely by "*Rictusempra*."

As expected, Snape managed to put up a shield for the second Body-Bind, but considering that he only had time for the standard one-hit *Protego*, the *Rictusempra* got him, and he began to laugh uncontrollably. Harry cracked his neck. "I could finish you off now, but no. I'll leave you here with the knowledge that you lost to an eleven-year-old boy without a Hogwarts education. Come, Seth."

"Yes, Harry." Seth coiled and lunged back onto Harry's arm, coiling up above the wand holster. Harry returned the wand to its holster before Metamorphing Seth back into tattoo format.

Harry turned to walk away, but looked over his shoulder. "And just so you know, *I never lose*. Have a nice day." To his surprise, he suddenly found himself floating upside down, facing a murderous-looking Snape. *Hmm. So this guy's able to do silent spells. Interesting spell, too. Must learn how to do this one.* "Interesting spell. Too bad, I can Dispel it!" Harry focused his magic through his words as he used Dispel, and promptly felt the spell on him lift. Flipping in midair, he landed on his feet, rolling his shoulders.

Harry let his gunblade resume its normal status in the real world, and pulled it out in one smooth motion, unknowing of the crowd that was slowly surrounding him and Snape. "There's a reason I survived for so many years on my own, you know. You have no chance against me."

Snape, who had managed to dispel the Slow spell with his *Finite Incantatem*, scrutinized the gunblade with a critical eye. *It looks similar to a sword, but it's almost as if it has a Muggle firearm attached, judging from the handle. No matter, magic is superior!* He raised his wand. "You've got it backwards, Potter! You have no chance against *me*!"

Harry chuckled. "You know, you haven't once mentioned your name to me? Because of that, I feel no need to be gentle."

"The name of the man who shall defeat you is Severus Snape," Snape said cockily as he fell into a dueling stance.

:Remember, Harry, do not show all your skills yet: Quetzalcoatl reminded his host.

I remember. Harry lowered his speed to only slightly faster than normal. Rushing at Snape, he dodged three jets of multi-colored light.

Snape was shocked; the Potter brat had Occlumency shields! At his age! That was nearly impossible! Nevertheless, he couldn't predict his opponent's movements.

Harry leapt high in the air, silhouetted by the sun. Clutching the gunblade with both hands, he plummeted down to earth, prepared to cut Snape in half.

Snape barely managed to leap aside as Harry landed on the ground, and his gunblade cut directly into the concrete, cutting through it fairly easily. Pulling it out of the ground, Harry whirled around and jumped into a flying spinning kick. The kick managed to slam into Snape's jaw with an audible crack, sending Snape to the floor. Harry put his gunblade at Snape's throat. "Yield."

Snape was a proud man, but even he knew when he was beaten. He nodded, not trusting his jaw to work properly, considering it was in a great deal of pain and probably broken.

Harry sheathed his gunblade, getting up. "I believe your name was Severus Snape? You would do well never to cross me again," he said dangerously, his green eyes – *Lily's eyes*, Snape thought – flashing. With that, he turned on his heel and strode away gracefully, the crowd parting for him almost unthinkingly. Then everyone's eyes turned to Snape, who painfully got his feet and plunged one hand into his pocket, disappearing without a sound.

Snape's Portkey landed him in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, and he quickly made his way to the infirmary. Madame Pomfrey glanced up as she heard Snape's nearly-silent footsteps, and gasped when she saw the awkward, obviously painful angle of his jaw. "Sit!" she commanded, drawing her wand. "This will be painful."

Snape said nothing, but barely suppressed a cry as Pomfrey magically fixed his jaw. After a few moments of making sure it was in

good working order again, he spoke. "Thank you," he said curtly, "but now I must speak with Albus."

"No need, Severus," Dumbledore's voice spoke from the doorway as he walked in. "How was your trip? I see you're back early."

"It is as I said!" Snape accused. "Potter is an egotistical brat with some small skill with a strange blade that he had hidden. We were going to Gringotts when he revealed that he already had all his supplies. When I questioned him about it, he snapped back at me and sent out his snake."

"What? Is he a Parselmouth?" Dumbledore asked eagerly.

"I don't know," Snape said hesitantly. "I didn't hear him hissing or anything, and I did hear him speak directly to the snake in English. I believe he called it Seth." Dumbledore appeared mildly disappointed, but nodded to Snape, indicating he should continue. "I attempted to Vanish the snake, but it dodged and hissed at me. Potter grew angrier and cast the Body-Bind. I shielded, but that damned snake bit me. Somehow, that snake's venom has the ability to slow down my physiological processes. I was moving at approximately half-speed."

"How interesting," Dumbledore murmured. "I think we both would like a sample of Harry's snake's venom."

"Continuing on, the Potter brat cast another Body-Bind followed shortly by a Tickling Charm. I was moving too slowly to dodge, so I attempted to shield. Unfortunately I was unable to bring up a second shield in time to block the Tickling Charm. Potter taunted me for a few seconds before turning to walk away, his snake joining him," Snape spat. "Arrogant brat! I used a silent *Finite Incantatem*, which allowed me to move at full speed once more. Then I cast *Levicorpus* on him, hoping to humiliate Potter without harming him, but he silently dispelled it before drawing his blade. He almost cut me in half, Albus! He would have if I hadn't jumped aside!" Snape was almost hysterical, but he took another deep breath. "Then he did some strange Muggle fighting move and one of his feet connected with my jaw. He then held his blade at my throat and ordered me to yield. I did so, he taunted me and left. I Portkeyed back and came here to get my jaw fixed."

“Hmm,” Dumbledore murmured, thinking heavily. *Silent casting already? And he can use a blade, and perhaps a snippet of Muggle Martial Arts? Occlumency, too. What were you doing at Balamb Garden, Harry? It sounds as if you were training to kill... This is dangerous. I need Harry to be my pawn, not my equal. An accident seems to be in order, followed by an immediate Memory Charm to make him forget all the years he spent away from Earth.*

“What are you going to do about Potter?” Snape demanded. “He’s a menace, and will almost certainly bully everyone he sees beneath him!”

“I will speak to him when he arrives,” Dumbledore promised. *And then I’ll Obliviate him. Say goodbye to your memories, Harry!*

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Oh dear, is Dumbledore gonna Obliviate Harry? Will he succeed in charming away Harry's entire childhood? Next time, an explanation of how the Memory Charm works, and Dumbledore's attempt. Read and Review! Tell me what you think!

Chapter 5: Welcome to Hogwarts... Obliviate!

Harry sighed upon his return to the Leaky Cauldron. Looking back, he'd revealed abilities he really shouldn't have shown. Thankfully, Snape hadn't mentioned Harry's name in the fight, so maybe, just maybe, it wouldn't be spread. *After all, Harry reasoned, I don't exactly look like the Harry Potter people are expecting, do I? Maybe they'll just think that I'm some random adult who Snape just happened to piss off?... I'm doomed. Not even junctioning something to my luck'll help there.*

:It can't hurt: Quetzalcoatl argued.

Good point. Go ahead.

:Done. Your Tornado is now junctioned to your luck stat.:

Thanks. He ran a hand through his long hair. "No use crying over spilled milk, I suppose," Harry muttered before pulling out one of his books. "Happy fucking birthday, Harry."

"Were you expecting presents or anything?" Seth asked.

"I suppose not," Harry replied after a moment. "I mean, no one here actually knows me."

"Then don't worry; you'll surely make some friends at this school. And we can return to Terra for Christmas if necessary."

Harry nodded and now focused on his reading. *What was that shield that Snape used? That could come in useful.*

:Indeed.:

Harry spent all of August reading and learning from his books. By far the best spell he'd mastered by September first was the Summoning Charm. It held great potential for offensive, defensive and non-combat purposes. He could summon something to block a curse, or he could summon an enemy's wand or limb. It was also conveniently only three syllables, which was on the shorter side of incantation length.

Directly after the Summoning Charm in usefulness was the Disarming Charm. It was one of the weaker dueling spells, but it would surely come in handy when Harry didn't want to reveal his true strength. Few people his age would have read that far, but it wasn't so terribly advanced as to reveal his strength.

Aside from studying, Harry learned more and more about the subtle art of pranks. He had one planned out for the first day of school. *That's going to be a memorable day if it all goes well*, Harry thought with a mischievous grin.

Finally, September first arrived. Harry had received an owl from Dumbledore with his ticket from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters at the London Train Station. Harry asked Tom how to get there, and Tom suggested that Harry take a Muggle taxi to the train station.

Harry exchanged some of his money for British pounds, and then left into Muggle London. Remembering Tom's advice, he raised one hand over the street. "Taxi!" Luckily for Harry, one was passing just at that moment and pulled over for Harry, who quickly got in, putting Hedwig and her cage in the back. Harry had shrunk his trunk containing all his books and clothes and placed it in his Item Bag. His wand, he always carried with him. After all, Harry didn't want to take the chance that he'd burn himself out by trying to do protective magic wandlessly.

"The train station!" Harry ordered.

"Yes sir," the driver agreed and drove off, shaking off the feeling he got from looking into Harry's eyes; those eyes were old and dangerous.

After ten minutes, the driver pulled over next to the train station. Harry paid him, took out Hedwig, and grabbed a cart. Pulling it over to the shadows so he wouldn't be seen, Harry pulled out his shrunken trunk from his Item Bag. "*Engorgio*," he muttered until the trunk was its proper size again. Then he placed it on the cart, and placed Hedwig's cage on top of that.

Now to find Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, Harry thought to himself. *There's Platform Nine... and there's Ten... so logically, Nine*

and Three-Quarters should be between them. Question is, how do I get to it? Harry checked the clock. It was ten-thirty. *Half an hour till the train leaves.*

Harry made his way to Platform Nine and sat down at a bench to think of his next plan of action. This place was full of Muggles, Harry could tell; this meant he couldn't use magic to find the Platform, according to the British Ministry of Magic's laws. Tom had told him the basic rules about magic in public so Harry wouldn't get in trouble.

It's got to be something simple, Harry continued, something that even eleven-year-olds can do without casting magic. After all, Muggleborns have to get through as well. It's also got to be inconspicuous, so as not to alert the Muggles. That means that it has to resemble what the crowd's doing at any given time so as to create an illusion of normalcy.

With that in mind, Harry looked around, but he couldn't see much; everyone was just shuffling about, making their way to their platforms. Quetzalcoatl decided to speak up. *:That's it, you know. Something you'd overlook normally. Everyone's walking to their platforms.* Quetzalcoatl emphasized the last part.

Harry's eyes widened in recognition. *You're right! Walking, walking... to keep Muggles out, it's got to be walking through something... but what?*

Thankfully for Harry, his sharp ears overheard a few words that a redheaded plump woman was telling to her equally-redheaded children. "... packed with Muggles of course. Now what's the platform number again?"

"Nine and Three-Quarters!" the small girl piped up. "Mom, can't I go..."

Harry smiled in relief. He began walking over to the redhead family.

"You're not old enough, Ginny, now be quiet," the mother replied. "All right, Percy, you go first."

The oldest and tallest boy there nodded and marched towards the dividing barrier between platforms nine and ten. Harry watched intently, trying to watch Percy the entire time, just in case he needed to do something. But apparently Fate was out to equalize Harry's luck, because a large number of tourists blocked Harry's sight just as Percy reached the barrier.

Cursing softly, Harry watched as the twins – Fred and George, Harry gathered from Fred's playing with their mother – went next. But Harry still wasn't sure. With magic, anything was possible. For all Harry knew, he needed to be told before the magic would let him through.

"Um, ma'am?" he asked politely.

"Yes dear? First time at Hogwarts? Ron's new too." She indicated a thin, lanky redhead, tall for his age, with loads of freckles and large hands and feet. *He'll be a clumsy one, for sure*, Harry thought to himself.

"I was just wondering, how do I get onto the platform?" Harry asked.

"Not to worry. All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into it, that's very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous. Go on, go now before Ron."

Interesting, Harry thought to himself. *The barrier depends on belief. It's simple, yet perfect for keeping out Muggles! Ingenious!* He knew magic existed, and fully believed he could do it, so he took it at a jog. He had to admit, the barrier looked completely solid, and if he hadn't been told, he never would have guessed it was just an illusion. He sped up slightly, focusing his thoughts on how he *knew* he'd get through it. And if all else failed, he'd just use a portal or something.

He closed his eyes as he reached the barrier, only to open them a second later as he and the cart went through it. In front of him was an old-style train, with many people wearing robes. People were getting onto the train. Above him there was a sign that read Hogwarts Express, eleven o'clock.

Harry's ears were assaulted by sound. Owls were hooting to each other in a disgruntled fashion, the crowd was chattering, trunks were being scraped. Harry winced for a few seconds until he got used to it. He made his way to one of the empty compartments at the end of the train, and carried Hedwig in one hand and his trunk in the other as he entered the compartment.

Following him with mouths agape were the redheaded twins from before; they couldn't believe their eyes. Either the raven-haired kid already knew how to make his trunk feather-light, or he was so strong as to carry it in one hand normally. Fred and George glanced at each other, nodded, and ran after him, entering the compartment.

Harry raised an eyebrow at them. "Fred, George," he said companionably.

"How'd you know?" they chorused.

"Overheard Fred here tricking your mum."

"Ah," one of the twins – Harry's couldn't tell which – answered. "Why's your hair all long?"

"Like it that way," Harry replied. "When I keep it short, it's so messy that even a comb plus hot water doesn't make it neat."

The twins sniggered. "Hey, what's that?" Fred – or was it George? – asked suddenly, pointing at Harry's forehead.

"Blimey," said George – or was it Fred? "Are you -?"

"He *is*," said the first twin. "Aren't you?"

Harry was confused. He had the sinking feeling that the twins would be doing this to him all the time. "What?"

"*Harry Potter*," the twins insisted.

"Ah," Harry said slowly in understanding. "Yeah, that's me." The twins gawked at him for a few moments. Harry sighed. "Listen, I'm not going to demand any special attention or anything. I *know* that I'm the

Boy-Who-Lived and all that, but please just treat me like I'm anybody else, ok? Don't judge me before you get to know me."

Before the twins could answer, a voice came floating in through the train's open door. "Fred? George? Are you there?"

"Coming, Mom." With a last look at Harry, the twins hopped off the train.

Harry leaned back into his seat, running a hand through his hair as he looked out the window. The redheaded family had met outside and the mother had just taken out her handkerchief. "Ron, you've got something on your nose." The youngest boy tried to jerk out of the way, but she grabbed him and began rubbing the end of his nose.

"*Mom!*" he whined. "Geroff!" He wriggled free.

"Aaah, has ickle Ronnie got somefink on his nosie?" said one of the twins – Harry *still* couldn't tell which.

"Shut up," said Ron.

"Where's Percy?" asked the mother.

"He's coming now."

The oldest boy came striding into sight. He had already changed into his billowing black Hogwarts robes, and Harry noticed a shiny silver badge on his chest with the letter *P* on it.

"Can't stay long, Mother," he said. "I'm up front, the prefects have got two compartments to themselves –"

"Oh, are you a *prefect*, Percy?" said one of the twins, with an air of great surprise. "You should have said something, we had no idea."

"Hang on, I think I remember him saying something about it," said the other. "Once..."

"Or twice..."

"A minute..."

“All summer...”

“Oh, shut up,” said Percy the Prefect.

Harry sniggered; Percy seemed like the type to hold rules above all else, and was proud of it. He sat back against his chair for another minute or so until he heard one of the twins raise his voice. “Hey, Mom, guess what? Guess who we just met on the train?”

Harry sighed, waiting for the inevitable.

“You know that black-haired boy who was near us in the station? Know who he is?”

“Who?”

“Harry Potter!”

Harry slapped one hand against his forehead in exasperation. He hadn’t even made it to Hogwarts, and he was already being talked about by the students.

“Oh, Mom, can I go on the train and see him, Mom, oh please...” the little girl’s voice pleaded.

“You’ve already seen him, Ginny, and the poor boy isn’t something you goggle at in a zoo.” Harry felt a rush of gratitude towards the friendly mother. “Is he really, Fred? How do you know?”

“Asked him. Saw his scar. It’s really there – like lightning.”

Harry rolled his eyes. He didn’t have any other scars, thanks to his Metamorphmagus abilities combined with his Curaga abilities. He’d tried healing that scar, getting rid of it permanently on his natural form, but even when he Metamorphed it away, he could sense the link anyway.

“Poor *dear* – no wonder he was alone, I wondered. He was ever so polite when he asked how to get onto the platform.”

“Never mind that, do you think he remembers what You-Know-Who looks like?”

Harry thought back to his age-old dreams of screaming a flashing green light that encompassed his entire vision. He remembered something more this time, however; a cold, high-pitched laugh that chilled his bones, and sent a shiver up his spine. *Was that Voldemort?*

“I forbid you to ask him, Fred. No, don’t you dare. As though he needs reminding of that on his first day at school.”

“All right, keep your hair on.”

A whistle sounded. “Hurry up!” their mother said, and the three boys clambered back onto the train.

Harry sat back against his seat, wondering if he’d make any real friends anytime soon. He wasn’t certain, with his scar mucking up people’s perceptions of him. With a lurch, the train began to move forward. Looking out the window, he saw Ginny half laughing, half crying, running to keep up with the train until it gathered too much speed, then she fell back and waved.

The train turned a corner, and houses flashed by the window. Harry watched idly until he heard the door of the compartment slide open. Turning to look, he saw Ron, the youngest redhead, come in. “Anyone sitting there?” he asked, pointing at the seat opposite Harry. “Everywhere else is full.”

Harry shook his head and waved Ron to sit down, who did so. Ron glanced at Harry and then looked quickly out the window, pretending he hadn’t looked. Harry suppressed a snort; he was *SeeD!* Of course he’d seen it.

The twins stepped in. “Hey, Ron. Listen, we’re going down the middle of the train – Lee Jordan’s got a giant tarantula down there.”

“Right,” mumbled Ron.

“Harry,” said the other twin. “Did we introduce ourselves? Fred and George Weasley. And this is Ron, our brother. See you later, then.”

“Bye,” said Harry and Ron. The twins slid the compartment door shut behind them. Harry and Ron looked at each other in silence, and Ron was obviously dying to say something.

:3...2... 1...: Quetzalcoatl chanted.

“Are you really Harry Potter?” Ron blurted, right on cue.

Harry had to struggle not to burst out laughing, so he merely nodded.

“Oh – well, I thought it might be one of Fred and George’s jokes,” explained Ron. “And have you really got – you know...” He answered his own question when he saw the scar for himself; Harry’s hair was pulled back in a ponytail, so the scar was out in the open. “So that’s where You-Know-Who...”

“Yes,” Harry answered with a sigh. “But I’d rather not think about it. I’m more than my scar.”

:*Much more*: Quetzalcoatl agreed.

“Oh,” Ron said, slightly taken aback. He sat and stared at Harry for a few moments, then, as though he had suddenly realized what he was doing, he looked quickly out the window again.

“Are all your family wizards and witches?” asked Harry.

“Er – yes, I think so,” Ron said. “I think Mom’s got a second cousin who’s an accountant, but we never talk about him.”

“So you must know loads of magic already,” Harry concluded.

“I heard you went and disappeared for a few years after living with some Muggles,” said Ron. “What happened?”

Now it was Harry’s turn to look away. “I ran away from the Muggles when I was five,” he whispered. “My family was horrible. Not all Muggles are, I’m certain, just them. And then... I’d rather not talk

about what happened afterwards. It's hard to be a five-year-old on the streets. That's all I'm going to say." *Not exactly a lie, but not the truth either.* He decided to change the subject. "So, just how many brothers do you have?"

"Five," said Ron. For some reason, he was looking gloomy. "I'm the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts. You could say I've got a lot to live up to. Bill and Charlie have already left – Bill was head boy and Charlie was captain of Quidditch. Now Percy's a prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they still get really good marks and everyone thinks they're really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it's no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five brothers. I've got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand, and Percy's old rat.

"Rat? Did someone say rat?" Seth hissed from the tattoo on Harry's arm.

"What was that?" Ron asked slowly.

"What?" Harry asked, feigning confusion.

"Never mind," Ron said, shaking his head as he pulled out his rat. It was fat, gray and asleep. "His name's Scabbers and he's useless, he hardly ever wakes up. Percy got an owl from my dad for being made a prefect, but they couldn't aff – I mean I got Scabbers instead." Ron's ears went pink, and he went back to staring out the window.

"Don't worry about it, Ron," Harry said simply. "There's nothing wrong with not having as much money as others."

"Something's strange about that rat," Seth told Harry from his place on Harry's arm. "The rat's smell is strange, human and rat."

Harry frowned, but he couldn't reply to Seth without giving away his talent. One of his talks with Tom had been subtle queries about his powers without telling him that Harry possessed them. Apparently Parselmouths were exceedingly rare, and they were considered evil because Voldemort was one. *How stupid,* Harry thought to himself. *Why judge a person by their abilities?* Metamorphmagi were not as rare, but still very uncommon. Animagi were rare as well, but mostly

because of the difficulty of becoming one, in addition to the necessity of registering once one's achieved it.

However, Ron had heard the hissing again. "There's a snake in here!" he said in a panic-stricken voice, putting Scabbers back in his pocket and standing on his chair.

"You're right, there is," Harry agreed. "Come on out, Seth." Harry released the Metamorphic power holding Seth as a tattoo, and Seth slithered out of Harry's shirt, coiling around Harry's arm. "Don't worry, Ron. He won't attack except on my order."

"What are you doing with a snake?" Ron demanded, almost hysterical.

"Seth is a friend of mine. He's helped me survive over the years," Harry said gently, trying to coax Ron into calming down. "Don't worry, he won't attack you or Scabbers." He looked pointedly at Seth, who nodded his scaly head. "See?"

Ron hesitantly sat back down, staring at Seth. Everyone was quiet for a time, and Seth fell asleep on Harry's warm arm.

Around half past noon, there was a great clattering outside in the corridor and a smiling, dimpled woman slid back their door. "Anything off the cart, dears?"

Harry smiled and nodded, but Ron's ears went pink again as he muttered that he'd brought sandwiches. Harry had some difficulty getting Seth off him, but he finally managed it, and went out into the corridor and examined the sweets. Deciding that he deserved a bit of sweets and some fun in his life, he got some of everything and paid the woman eleven Sickles and seven Knuts. Harry brought it all back into the compartment and tipped it onto an empty seat as Ron stared.

"Hungry, are you?"

"Yeah," Harry agreed right before taking a large bite out of a Pumpkin Pasty.

Ron made a face as he unwrapped a lumpy package that was apparently his lunch; there were four corned beef sandwiches. "She always forgets I don't like corned beef."

Harry took pity on Ron; it wasn't his fault that his family was poor. "Swap you for one of these," Harry offered, holding up a pasty.

"You don't want this, it's all dry," Ron said. "She hasn't got much time, you know, with five of us."

"Go on, have a pasty," Harry insisted. A few minutes later, Harry was smiling as he and Ron ate their way through all Harry's food.

Harry blinked as he held up a pack of Chocolate Frogs. "What are these? Are they really frogs?"

"Nah," Ron denied. "But see what the card is. I'm missing Agrippa."

"What?" Harry asked, confused. What did this Chocolate Frog have to do with cards?

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't know – Chocolate Frogs have cards inside them, you know, to collect – famous witches and wizards. I've got about five hundred, but I haven't got Agrippa or Ptolemy."

Harry unwrapped his Chocolate Frog and picked up the card. It was a man he recognized: Dumbledore. He looked at the back and read: Currently Headmaster of Hogwarts. Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.

Harry turned the card back over and saw to his astonishment that Dumbledore's face had disappeared. "He's gone!"

"Well, you can't expect him to hang around all day," Ron said simply. "He'll be back." He unwrapped another Chocolate Frog. "No, I've got Morgana again and I've got about six of her... do you want it? You can start collecting."

“Sure, why not?” Harry accepted the card and put it in his Item Bag along with the Dumbledore card. After several minutes of eating the Chocolate Frogs and collecting the various cards, Harry opened a bag of Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans.

“You want to be careful with those,” Ron warned. “When they say every flavor, they *mean* every flavor. You get all the ordinary ones like chocolate and peppermint, but you also get the spinach and liver and tripe. George reckons he got a booger-flavored one once.” Ron picked up a green bean, looked at it carefully, and bit into a corner. “Urgh... see? Sprouts.”

Harry quite enjoyed the beans and their mystery flavors, but soon enough he and Ron were full, and there were still some candies left. There was a knock on the door of their compartment and a round-faced boy came in, looking tearful.

“Sorry, but have you seen a toad at all?” When Harry and Ron shook their heads, he wailed, “I’ve lost him! He keeps getting away from me!”

Harry stood up. “I’ve got an idea. What’s your toad’s name?”

“Trevor.”

Harry raised his left hand, holding his wand. “*Accio Trevor!*”

A moment later, a toad flew through the air and into Harry’s spare hand. “Here you go,” he told the boy, handing him his toad. “Why don’t you sit down with us? We’ve got plenty of food here,” he said, indicating the spare seat with some candies still left.

“OK,” he agreed hesitantly, sitting down and taking one of the Cauldron Cakes. “Thanks.”

“No problem. What’s your name?”

“Neville Longbottom.”

“Ron Weasley, nice to meet you.”

“Harry Potter, same here.”

“You’re Harry Potter?” Neville whispered.

“Oh, not again,” Harry moaned. “Listen, I’m just a normal guy, ok? Ignore the fame; I hate it and would do anything to get rid of it.”

The compartment door slid open again. This time it was a bushy-haired girl dressed in her new Hogwarts robes. She spotted Neville with his toad. “Ah, Neville, you found it!”

“Yeah, it was Harry here who got it for me.”

Hermione saw Ron take out his wand to inspect it. “Oh, are you doing magic?”

“No,” Ron said hurriedly. “Haven’t learned any yet.”

“Is that so? I’ve tried a few simple spells just for practice and it’s all worked for me. Nobody in my family’s magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it’s the very best school of witchcraft there is, I’ve heard – I’ve learned all our course books by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough – I’m Hermione Granger by the way, who are you?” She said all this very fast.

“Ron Weasley,” Ron muttered.

“Harry Potter.”

“Are you really?” Hermione took a deep breath, obviously about to get going again, but Harry decided to cut her off.

“Yes, I am. And please don’t mention any books that I’m in; I wasn’t interviewed for any of them, and I rather doubt that any of the authors were actually there when Voldemort killed my parents, so they couldn’t know much. It’s just speculation.”

Hermione looked very disgruntled at that. “What house will you be in?”

“Dunno,” Harry replied.

“I’ve been asking around, and I hope I’m in Gryffindor, it sounds by far the best; I hear Dumbledore himself was in it, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn’t be too bad... Anyway, you two had better change, you know, I expect we’ll be there soon.”

“Whatever house I’m in, I hope she’s not in it,” said Ron.

Harry frowned. “What’s wrong with her?” he demanded.

“She’s a know-it-all,” Ron said as if that explained everything.

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” Harry argued. “I’ll have you know that I’m a know-it-all too! I must’ve spent a third of my life in a library!”

“Don’t tell me you *want* to be in the same house as her!” Ron exclaimed.

“I wouldn’t mind it one bit!” Harry shot back. “But I’m getting the feeling that you and I won’t get along even if we are sorted in the same house! I won’t stand for your discriminations!”

“I’m getting the same feeling!” Ron yelled. “I should have known when you showed your snake! You’re going to be a slimy Slytherin!”

Neville was watching as the two yelled at each other. He shifted over into the corner, hoping to avoid being drawn in.

“There’s nothing wrong with Slytherin! They’re cunning and intelligent!” Harry said coldly.

“Slytherins are evil! Look how many served You-Know-Who!”

“And just how much was that influenced by the other houses bullying them into it?” Harry demanded. “They took the only opportunity available to them to be equal to everyone else!”

“Why should Slytherins be equal to everyone else?” Ron countered. “They’re evil, slimy gits who get around the rules and blackmail people!”

Harry was getting nowhere with Ron, and he knew it. It wasn't worth it to keep arguing; Ron had apparently been indoctrinated to believe that Slytherins were inherently evil. Only first-hand experience and glaringly obvious facts might change his mind. "Well, in that case, until you learn to be more tolerant of those different from you, you don't have the right to call me by my first name, Weasley."

"Why should I know you by your first name, Potter?" Ron sneered. "After all, you're a sickeningly slimy Slytherin!"

Harry replied. "But since we have to peacefully coexist for the moment, how about we both just ignore the other for the remainder of the trip?"

"What?" Ron asked, confused.

"Just shut up and I'll do the same," Harry said with a sigh.

Neville almost sighed in relief, but stayed close to the corner. He had to admit, Harry had a few good points, but Neville was afraid of getting involved. About a minute later, Neville was grateful for his decision to stay out of the way as the compartment door slid open yet again, this time showing three students.

"Draco Malfoy," Harry greeted. "Think much about what we were talking about in Madame Malkin's? And who're your companions?"

Draco shrugged. "This is Vincent Crabbe, and this is Gregory Goyle. I will admit you had me going for a bit, but a talk with father helped set me straight. I will be a Slytherin, mark my words!"

"You've already talked with Malfoy!" Ron yelled. "I knew it! I knew you were a Slytherin from the start!"

Draco raised an eyebrow at Harry. "Indeed? Then at least I will have some intelligent conversation. Crabbe and Goyle here are good for the leg work, but they don't have much in the brains department, I'm afraid."

"If I end up in Slytherin, I think I'll take you up on that," Harry said slowly.

"You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Harry Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there."

Any form of respect Harry had for the young Malfoy evaporated in an instant. "You know, you're sounding exactly like Weasley did a few minutes ago. Thought he was better than you and all Slytherins, just because he's certain he won't be one."

Draco and Ron looked at each other in shock and disbelief. "I sound nothing like him!" they yelled together, then looked at each other again with jaws dropped.

"See what I mean?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow. "Discriminatory bastards, the both of you. I want nothing to do with either of you."

Draco didn't go as red as Ron did then, but a pink tinge did appear in his pale cheeks. "I'd be careful if I were you, Potter," he said slowly. "Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents."

"Is that a threat?" Harry asked with a dangerous glint in his eyes, standing up. "Trust me, you don't want me as your enemy. I can and will make your life hell."

"Oh, you're going to fight us, are you?" Malfoy sneered.

"Only if you make me," Harry warned, pulling out his wand. "But if you start it, I sure as hell will finish it. And there won't be enough left of you to cremate when I'm through. So back off, or face the consequences."

"What can you do?" Malfoy said condescendingly.

Harry's eyes narrowed. "*Expelliarmus!*" he spat, throwing his considerable power and will into the simple Disarming Charm.

The spell slammed into Malfoy with the force of a two-ton hammer, who went flying backwards into Crabbe and Goyle, and the three of them slammed into the corridor wall, Malfoy's wand flying through the air until Harry caught it in his right hand.

That spell is not supposed to be that powerful, Harry thought in wonder, looking at his wand.

:I told you that you're more powerful than most.:

"Give me my wand!" Malfoy demanded.

Harry glanced at Malfoy's wand, which he still held in his right hand. He tossed it back at Malfoy's feet. "That was only a taste of my power. Do not tempt me." Malfoy snatched up his wand, and seconds later he, Crabbe and Goyle disappeared down the corridor.

Harry sat back down, and Ron inched away from him, afraid of his raw power. A few seconds later, Hermione Granger came in. She glanced at Harry's mask of calm and Ron's genuine face of barely suppressed fear and jealousy. "What *has* been going on?"

Harry and Ron glanced at each other, one piercingly, the other fearfully. Ron swallowed hard and licked his lips. "Nothing," he said in a slightly higher tone than normal.

Hermione was a very observant witch, however, and saw the exchange. "Don't lie to me. What's going on?"

Harry looked at Hermione. "Oh, not much. Weasley here merely showed me how much discrimination he has, and I broke off any semblance of friendship we had. Draco Malfoy showed up and proved that he, too, has too much bigotry for my taste, so I refused his friendship and used the Disarming Charm on him when he threatened me. I hope that after the Sorting's over you and I can become friends."

Hermione turned to Neville, who was hiding in the corner as best he could. "That true, Neville?" she asked kindly.

Neville looked between Harry and Ron before nodding slowly. "Is *Expelliarmus* the Disarming Charm?" he asked Harry timidly.

Harry nodded. "Pretty simple spell, but when you overcharge it, you get results like what happened to Malfoy. Normally it's just supposed

to knock them back a little and make their wand fly through the air. Not send them flying.”

Hermione gasped. “You’re going to get in trouble before school even starts!”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry about it. We’re probably not going to be in the same house anyway, and trust me, Malfoy’s not about to go telling anyone of his defeat. Now, would you mind stepping out so we can change into our robes?”

“Fine,” Hermione huffed, and left the compartment.

Ron and Harry looked at each other and silently agreed to a cease-fire until they reached Hogwarts. Neville silently sighed in relief. Five minutes later, all three were dressed in their Hogwarts robes. The train stopped not long later, and they got off the train.

“Firs’ years! Firs’ years over here!” an absolute giant of a man called out. He was at least seven feet tall, with broad shoulders and a crossbow on his arm. *Scan!* Harry mentally commanded.

Rubeus Hagrid – Half-giant, half-man

Keeper of the Keys of Hogwarts

Height: 7 feet, 4 inches

Weight: 480 pounds

Weapon of Choice: Crossbow

Preferring to be called by his last name, Hagrid attended Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry as a child, but was expelled in his third year for reasons unknown. His wand was snapped, but the pieces remain in his umbrella, which Hagrid uses discretely in his duties as gamekeeper.

Hagrid is familiar with many of the creatures in the Forbidden Forest, the forest near Hogwarts, including the Acromantula and centaur

populations. Fiercely loyal to those who earn his trust, Hagrid is, despite his giant heritage, harmless to all unless his temper is ignited.

Consequences of Giant Blood:

Highly resistant to offensive magic

Affinity for dangerous animals (magical and nonmagical)

Threat Level: 27

Interesting, Harry thought with a raised eyebrow as he walked over to Hagrid, who gathered everyone to follow him down a steep, narrow, dark path. *Seems like a decent guy, and a good ally to have.* Harry watched silently as the rest of the students clambered into carriages pulled by a strange breed of horses with wings, except these horses were highly emaciated, looking almost like the undead. Then, noticing that if he didn't follow now, he'd be left behind, Harry hurried after the other first years.

There was little talking as they followed the half-giant through the trees. "Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec," Hagrid said as they turned the bend.

There was a loud murmuring of "Ooooooh!" Even Harry was impressed; on top of a high mountain on the other side of a large black lake, Hogwarts was a magnificent castle, its windows sparkling in its many turrets and towers. What was even more impressive was the sense that Harry got of the immense amount of magic Hogwarts had at its disposal.

"No more'n four to a boat!" Hagrid called out. Harry got into one of the last boats, and was joined a few moments later by Hermione, Neville, and someone he didn't recognize. Ron had apparently chosen to sit with a few other people.

"Righ' then," Hagrid said after they were all in. "FORWARD!" The little boats moved off all at once, gliding across the lake, which was seemingly as smooth as glass. No one spoke; everyone, even Harry, was entranced by the sight of Hogwarts as they approached.

“Heads down!” Hagrid yelled as the first boats reached the cliff. Everyone ducked dutifully, and the boats took them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide opening in the cliff. Going down a long dark tunnel, the boats eventually reached a kind of underground harbor, where everyone got out.

“Neville!” Harry called to him as he noticed that Neville had forgotten his toad. “You forgot Trevor.”

Neville’s eyes lit up. “Thank you, Harry,” he said quietly as he took the toad. Hagrid checked the boats, and then led them up a passageway in the rock until the students came out onto grass right in the shadows of Hogwarts. Hagrid knocked on the castle door three times, and it swung open at once, revealing a tall, black-haired witch in emerald-green robes wearing a very stern face.

Harry raised an eyebrow; she gave off an impression that she was not to be crossed or else dire punishments would then ensue. To most students that would be more than enough reason not to break the rules, but to Harry, it merely meant a challenge. *But*, Harry reasoned, *it might be wise to Scan her first. Scan!*

Minerva McGonagall

Head of Gryffindor House at Hogwarts

Transfiguration Professor

Strict but fair is the code by which McGonagall teaches. Striving to maintain the balance of rooting for her house in the inter-house rivalries while not being completely biased against the other houses, McGonagall’s presence demands respect. A master of transfiguration, McGonagall’s loyalty resides predominantly in Headmaster Dumbledore.

McGonagall, while she maintains a strict exterior, hides a more sensitive side that she rarely lets out. Caring deeply for her students, she acts as a surrogate mother to anyone in Gryffindor House, and even some outside of it. She is always willing to provide a second opinion, and is respected by all the teachers, even the Head of Slytherin House, Severus Snape.

Special Abilities/Talents:

Expert Cat Animagus – has fully incorporated the cat within, resulting in better hearing, sight and balance, as well as some additional catlike tendencies.

Threat Level: 32

Harry blinked in astonishment. Thirty-two was a high level for anyone not trained by SeeD. She would be a dangerous foe, and, according to the magic theory that he'd read, she'd be gaining magical strength as she grew older. Harry judged McGonagall to be approximately fifty years old, perhaps a decade or two older if the magic had slowed her aging. Wizards and witches commonly lived about a century and half, which meant that she was going to be very impressive.

In his musings, Harry had completely missed the short exchange between Hagrid and McGonagall. He came to his senses as she opened the door wide and led the first years into the entrance hall, which was itself quite impressive. She showed them into a small, empty chamber off the hall near a doorway on the right through which hundreds of voices could be heard.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," began McGonagall. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory, and spend free time in your house common room." She went on to describe the point system at Hogwarts, and then suggested that everyone smarten themselves up as best they could before the Sorting. "I shall return when we are ready for you. Please wait quietly."

Harry was the absolute picture of quiet confidence, and the people crowded near him felt themselves calming down. Even Hermione, who was jabbering quietly about all the spells she learned, fell silent and her nervousness slowly abated.

Then, right as everyone was quiet, waiting for their turn, over a dozen ghosts streamed out through a side wall, and a few people screamed.

Harry clenched and unclenched his fists, ready for a battle... though what he would be able to do against the slightly transparent, pearly-white ghosts, he hadn't a clue. *Glad I have some Holy spells right about now.*

Thankfully for Harry's nerves, the ghosts seemed to be arguing amongst themselves, not even looking at the first years. A stout monk was speaking when they went through. "Forgive and forget, I say. We ought to give him a second chance..."

"My dear Friar, haven't we given Peeves all the chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name and you know, he's not really even a ghost – I say, what are you all doing here?"

A ghost wearing a ruff, tights, and a spectral sword by his side, had suddenly noticed the first years. Feeling particularly brave at the moment, Harry spoke up. "We're the first years waiting for the Sorting."

"Ah, then welcome to Hogwarts!" the Friar said in a jolly tone. "Hope to see you in Hufflepuff! I'm the Hufflepuff House Ghost."

McGonagall walked in and noticed the ghosts. "Move along now. The Sorting Ceremony's about to start." The ghosts floated away through another wall. "Now, form a line, and follow me."

Harry somehow ended up in the lead; the other students almost seemed to view him as their leader, with the exception of a certain redhead and blond who quietly got in line under McGonagall's gaze. Then she led the new students out of the chamber and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall.

Harry looked around with the other first years, but his gaze wasn't solely focused on the extraordinary. There were four parallel tables of children of various ages, obviously the ones who had already been Sorted into their houses. A brief glance at a few of the visible badges allowed Harry to discern which table meant which house. At the opposite end of the giant hall, another table was filled with the teachers, Hagrid included. Above them all, hundreds of candles floated below a ceiling, which had been enchanted to appear as the sky.

Harry's attention snapped onto McGonagall as she silently placed a stool in front of the first years, and then put an old, dirty, frayed, pointed wizard's hat on it. A quick glance around the hall proved to Harry that everyone was staring at the hat.

Suddenly, the hat twitched. A rip near the brim opened wide, almost resembling a mouth, and the hat began to – of all things – sing. When it was done with the song, Harry's jaw was hanging slack before he realized what he was doing and snapped it shut. *OK, I've seen a great many strange things in my life, but I think this tops it all.*

:I concur.:

The hall slowly stopped clapping, and Harry heard Ron mutter, "I'll kill Fred, he was going on about wrestling a troll."

Professor McGonagall stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment. "When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted. Abbot, Hannah!"

A pink-faced girl with blond pigtails slowly got out of line, put on the hat and sat down. After a moment, the hat shouted, "HUFFLEPUFF!"

The Hufflepuff table cheered and clapped as Hannah joined them, and did so again as "Bones, Susan" was also sorted into Hufflepuff. Harry watched carefully, making sure he got their names. Hermione went to Gryffindor after a few seconds under the hat. Neville took almost a full minute for the hat to decide, but became a Gryffindor. Draco Malfoy was Sorted into Slytherin less than a second after the hat touched his head.

Finally, it was Harry's turn. "Potter, Harry!"

Harry walked forward gracefully, sat on the stool and put on the hat. The instant he had, he felt a pressure on his Occlumency shields. Harry, suspicious as ever, reinforced them immediately. "You have to lower your Occlumency for me to sort you," a small voice in his ear murmured. "How am I supposed to sort you by personality if I cannot see it?"

Harry forced one thought through for the hat to see: *If I ever find that you tell what you discover in my head, trust me, you will be nothing more than ashes on the wind.*

“Of course, I was sworn to secrecy by Godric Gryffindor himself.”

Hesitantly, Harry allowed his shields to fall. “You’ve led quite an interesting life, Harry. But, on with the Sorting.” The hat dug deeper. “Difficult, very difficult. You’ve got plenty of courage, and what’s this? A deep thirst for knowledge. Oh goodness, the loyalty you have for your friends! And you have a strong ambition to be the strongest to protect them. Never in my long life have I had a more difficult person to sort. You’re quite well-rounded. You would do well in any house. Good grief, you have the spirit of Hufflepuff, the heart of Gryffindor, the brains of Ravenclaw, and the mind of Slytherin! What to do with you...”

More than a minute had passed as the hat tried to decide. “You dislike the bigotry on both sides of the Gryffindor-Slytherin rivalry, and want to change it by ending the hostilities between them. A noble goal to be sure, but unlike the Gryffindors, you see magic as neither Light nor Dark, only Neutral.” A few more seconds. “I cannot decide. You must choose between Slytherin and Gryffindor.”

A voice from the outside interrupted. “Perhaps he doesn’t have enough magic?” Malfoy’s voice proposed.

The hat stiffened angrily. “I’ll have you know, Draco Malfoy, that this one would have had the Four Founders themselves squabbling over who would get him! You would do well to learn a few things from Mr. Potter here!”

A few murmurs, but Harry ignored them. Harry tossed each idea over in his head. *Well, with Slytherin’s gift, Parseltongue, and my natural sneakiness with Metamorph powers, my talents seem to indicate a need for Slytherin. But then again, as a Slytherin, how am I supposed to make my ideas heard amongst everyone? The prejudice against Slytherin is enormous.* Harry’s eyes widened, not that anyone could see, as the hat still covered them. *Which would make it all the more effective when I finally do get through to the idiots that Slytherin does not mean evil. Fine, hat, I choose Slytherin!*

“May the Founders forgive me for putting Gryffindor’s heart in Slytherin... SLYTHERIN!”

Absolute silence reigned as Harry took off the hat. All eyes followed Harry as he marched resolutely down to the Slytherin table. Harry observed the reactions. The Gryffindors looked completely betrayed. The Hufflepuffs looked scared, the Ravenclaws looked curious, but the Slytherins appeared of mixed reactions. Some looked pleased – mostly the older years – while others looked absolutely murderous.

Harry sat down and glanced at the teachers. McGonagall had a slightly slack jaw. Hagrid looked dumbfounded, Dumbledore was in shock, a short man that Harry didn’t know the name to looked on with a raised eyebrow, a plump stout woman who Harry guessed was Hufflepuff’s Head of House looked visibly nervous, while Snape looked as if he’d eaten raw meat of a T-rexaur with Tabasco sauce applied liberally. In short, he looked angry enough to breathe fire like a dragon.

After a few seconds, McGonagall recovered enough to continue the list. “Thomas, Dean!”

Harry ignored the other Sortings for the moment in order to properly assess his new housemates. Most of the Slytherins in his year appeared to be glaring at him, as did some of older students. *Wish I knew some good wards about now... probably going to need them tonight.*

:Sounds like a trip to the library is in order.:

The feast soon finished, and Dumbledore stood once more. The hall fell silent. “Ahem – just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered” – Harry snorted; *What does he think we are, plants?* – “I have a few start-of-term notices to give you. First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all people, hence the name Forbidden Forest. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that was well.” Dumbledore’s twinkling eyes fell on the Weasley twins. “I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors. Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams

should contact Madam Hooch. And Finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. *What’s he guarding in there? And why not simply ward it so no one can get in? What are you planning, Dumbledore?*

“And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!” cried Dumbledore.

Harry’s eyes bugged. “Sing? I don’t sing,” he muttered.

Dumbledore flicked his wand, and a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted itself into words. “Everyone pick their favorite tune, and off we go!”

Harry barely resisted the urge to cover his ears as the cacophony of sound assaulted his poor eardrums. Quetzalcoatl was wailing in his head, begging for the torture to stop. Harry, personally, agreed with him.

“Ah, music,” Dumbledore said as the Weasley Twins finished their funeral-march-style singing. “A magic beyond all we do here! And now, bedtime. Off you trot!”

Harry and the other first years were led to the Slytherin Common Room in the dungeons by Flint. The Common Room was apparently hidden behind a stretch of bare, damp stone wall. “I’m only gonna tell you the password once: it’s Parseltongue.”

Harry’s sharp eyes noticed a small snake carving directly in the center of the wall that opened. He stored it for future reference, just in case he needed the knowledge. The common room itself was a long, low underground room with rough stone walls. The ceiling, also rough, provided round, greenish lamps hanging on chains. There was an elaborate mantelpiece that served as the fireplace. “This is our common room,” Flint said simply, marching the first year boys through it past some wooden doors that had green and silver names on them. Soon, they reached the door that simply said “First Years.”

Flint opened it. "This is your dorm. Do not wake up any of the older years, or they will come and it will not be pleasant. If you must stay awake and fight, do so quietly, or learn the Silencing Charm first. Here's the first rule of Slytherin: even if we have internal conflicts here, on the outside, we stick together. It's us against everyone else, and we only have Professor Snape rooting for us. I don't care if you're pureblood, halfblood or, Salazar save us, mudblood, we show no weakness outside of the common room. The other houses will take advantage if they see any weakness to exploit, so do not hesitate to do the same to them. Got it?" Everyone nodded. "Good. Second rule of Slytherin: the one in power makes the rules. Magical power, political power, it don't matter. Power equals respect. Third rule of Slytherin: be on your guard with the Headmaster. If you don't know Occlumency, don't look him in the eye. He can read your thoughts, but he has to look you in the eye first. Do not eat, drink or even touch anything that he offers you. It is most likely laced with one potion or another, especially those lemon drops of his. As long as you remember these three rules, you should be fine." Flint turned to leave, but then looked over his shoulder. "One more thing. Betrayal of the house will be punished by all of the Slytherins. Period." He left.

Harry looked around. He, Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, Theodore Nott and Blaise Zabini were the six Slytherin boys this year. The girls, he remembered, were Pansy Parkinson, Millicent Bulstrode, and Daphne Greengrass.

Malfoy decided he would assert himself in the leadership position by stepping to the bed closest to the door and declaring, "This is my bed. Crabbe, Goyle, you get those beds over there" – he pointed at the one across from him, and one next to his; Harry could easily see why; he was relying on them to be his bodyguards – "Zabini, you get that one, Nott, your bed's over there, and Potter, you've got the one farthest from the door."

Malfoy looked at Zabini and Nott, who shrugged, and then the two of them looked at Harry to see if he would challenge the arrangements. Harry considered arguing with Malfoy for a couple of tense moments, but decided to choose his battles; he would wait until he could be reasonably protected at night before angering the pureblood. "Whatever."

Malfoy smirked, apparently satisfied that he had effectively established who was top dog. "Now, let's get some sleep; we'll need it tomorrow morning for classes." Harry and Blaise dragged their trunks – they were in the middle of the dorm – to their appropriate beds, while Crabbe and Goyle not only did theirs, but Malfoy's as well.

Harry closed his curtains and undressed, bringing Seth out from his tattoo state. Casting a quiet *Silencio* on the curtains to block out sound, he turned to face his serpent companion. "Seth, my friend, I have a very important favor to ask. While I sleep, I need you to guard me and my belongings. I cannot trust anyone but you here."

Seth looked at Harry curiously. "Can you not sleep anywhere else?"

"I'm afraid I must sleep here, Seth. To do otherwise would draw attention. I know I hold power over you as a snake-speaker, but I will not force this upon you if you do not want it," Harry told his beloved snake.

"I understand, Harry. I shall guard you while you sleep."

"Thank you."

With that, Harry allowed himself to sleep, setting his mental clock to wake him at five o'clock; after all, he needed to do his exercise, and he rather doubted that any of the purebloods would be awake so early. He'd seen how the wealthy lived, and they were rather lazy.

Like clockwork, at five o'clock Harry awoke with a clear head, alert and ready for almost anything. Throwing his sixth sense out to verify that all was well, Harry got up and quickly dressed in his Gravija-enchanted clothes. "Seth, go ahead and sleep now."

Seth gratefully wrapped around the arm Harry offered. "Please use your ability to make me part of your skin; it is so much warmer and I rest easy that way."

Harry acquiesced and Metamorphed Seth into the usual snake tattoo. With that, Harry quietly crept past the loudly-snoring pair of Crabbe and Goyle, past the peaceful-looking Malfoy, and into the common

room. To his mild surprise, there were a couple of people at the fireplace, merely watching it without talking.

Ignoring them, Harry exited the common room and walked confidently through the castle until he reached the door to the outside, which he opened as quietly as he could and slipped through.

“Ah,” Harry sighed as he relaxed, feeling the cool mountain air caressing him. *Quetzalcoatl, take off all junctions, please.*

:Done.:

Harry stretched for a few minutes, making sure he wouldn't cramp up – that was really painful, Harry knew from experience. Then he took off and started running around the lake. It was very large, so it took Harry a few minutes to complete a circuit. He ran around the lake five times as a warm up, but threw himself to the ground and began his pushups. “Slow!” Harry cast on himself, which made this much harder; his movements were much slower, but the strain on his muscles to move faster helped him grow stronger and faster. When his arms couldn't take it anymore, he flipped onto his back and did his sit-ups. By then, the Slow spell had worn off, so Harry practiced his tumbles, and then he drew his gunblade and began an advanced kata to keep himself familiar in its use.

When Harry was done, he glanced at his watch; it was almost six-thirty. Breakfast began at seven-thirty, so Harry stripped off his shirt and wand holster and gracefully dove into the lake. It was refreshingly cold, and Harry grinned as he swam in the lake to cool down from his exercise. After ten minutes, Harry returned to the shore. The sun had risen during his morning exercise, and Harry's muscular body gleamed as the water dripped off it. Taking his wand, Harry muttered a Drying Charm on himself. Then he pulled his shirt back on and pulled on two scrunchies for his long hair, pulling it into his standard ponytail. With that, Harry jogged back to the castle.

Little did he know that he had had an audience during his exercises. Several Gryffindors were rushing through their homework – they had forgotten to do it over the holidays – and some Ravenclaws were adding finishing touches to them. As it so happened, both common rooms had a great view of the lake and Forbidden Forest, so they had

seen a boy with long, black hair go running around the lake and exercise. They couldn't make out the boy's features, but the exercise had looked quite impressive, especially when he took out what looked like a sword. When he started walking in, the girls and guys, their homework forgotten, snatched up their homework and ran as quickly as they could to the Great Hall for breakfast.

Harry got a strange, ominous feeling that he had felt before in Balamb Garden. Trying to pin what exactly it meant, his eyes widened. *No... it can't be... I only just showed up! Don't let it be...* Harry took a quick peek from one of the Great Hall doors and saw dozens of Gryffindors and Ravenclaws rushing down. ...fangirls!

:*RUN!*: Quetzalcoatl urged. :*RUN FOR YOUR LIFE AND DIGNITY!*:

I have a better idea! They don't like Slytherin, right? Let me just sit at Slytherin table.

:*If you're sure...*: Quetzalcoatl said hesitantly.

Harry rushed over to the Slytherin table, and with a frown of concentration changed his workout clothes into the Hogwarts uniform. The girls – and a few guys, Harry noticed with a shiver – came in eagerly and looked around. Then, they realized to their horror that the only long dark-haired person there was in the hall was Harry Potter, the subject of the Slytherin scandal.

One Ravenclaw, an Asian by the looks of it, spoke up. “That can't be him; the guy on the grounds had a sword, and was dressed differently. Potter's in his school uniform.”

“Yeah,” the girls agreed instantly. “We may as well eat while we're here.”

Harry gave a quiet sigh of relief, and began eating. At eight o'clock, Severus Snape entered the Great Hall, his robes billowing out behind him as usual. By then, all the Slytherins had shown up, so he passed out their schedules. He almost skipped Harry entirely on purpose, but Harry stopped him from succeeding by asking him directly for his schedule. *Insolent brat!* Snape practically shoved the schedule on him. “Potter, the Headmaster requests your presence.”

Harry was sorely tempted to put the greasy git's hair on fire, to see how long the oily hair would keep lit, but fought down the urge. Instead, he nodded and looked at his schedule, quickly memorizing it; he didn't trust his housemates not to burn the schedule and accuse him of losing it. Then he got up and followed Snape out of the Great Hall, ignoring the sudden whispers in his direction.

Snape led Harry to a gargoyle. "Sugar Imps." The gargoyle jumped aside and the wall behind it rotated, revealing a large winding staircase. Harry went up with Snape, who was steadfastly ignoring him. Snape knocked on the door.

"Come in, Severus, Harry."

Snape practically dragged Harry inside. Seated at his desk was Dumbledore. "Please, Harry, have a seat."

Harry approached the seat and thought hard on the magic he wanted. *Dispell!* He sat on the chair and was relieved to not feel anything change. It was a comfy chair, though.

Dumbledore lifted up a basket of lemon drops. "Lemon drop?"

"No, thank you," Harry said politely. "May I ask the reason of this visit?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled at him. "It has come to my attention that you and Professor Snape do not coexist well, given the fight you had when he came to help you pick up your supplies."

Harry blinked slowly, waiting for Dumbledore to get to the point.

After a pause, Dumbledore continued. "Given the hostilities between the two of you, I offer a solution. How would you like to join Gryffindor House?"

Harry was surprised at the offer. "Do you make this offer often?"

"No, but you have special circumstances. You are the Boy-Who-Lived, and several of Voldemort's supporters reside in Slytherin, while none, to the best of my knowledge, are in Gryffindor at the moment. In

Slytherin, you will likely suffer assassination attempts, while in Gryffindor, you can make many friends and avoid the discrimination of Slytherin. Do you want to switch?"

If I was really eleven years old, that would convince me, Harry had to admit to himself. But I have a goal: to bring Slytherin back to its former glory! To quit now would be selfish, which is completely against Gryffindor ways. "No."

"Are you sure? Here, have a lemon drop while you decide. I insist."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "I don't need to think about it any longer than I already have. I choose to stay in Slytherin."

Dumbledore frowned. "Then at least take a lemon drop as you go to class."

Harry's trust in the Headmaster was sinking like a stone. "No, thank you. I already had breakfast."

Dumbledore gave a forced smile. "Very well. Go on to class."

Harry nodded and turned to leave. Suddenly his sixth sense screamed at him, joined by Quetzalcoatl. There was imminent danger right beside him! Harry tried to jump back, but the spell was already on its way. Then, he knew nothing.

Dumbledore stood over the boy that his loyal Potions Master had Stunned. "Thank you, Severus. Now, leave me with the boy; I have some memories to modify."

Snape smirked, nodded, and left. *I may not be able to transfer houses without willing participation,* Dumbledore thought in frustration, *but at least I can erase his years away, and make him believe that the Dursleys took care of him for all those years.* "Obliviate!"

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Before you all kill me, I point back up to the top of the chapter. You'll see the results of the Obliviation next chapter. Aside from that, hope you enjoyed it. Read and Review, please! Oh, and I'm NOT going to

update again until I get a decent amount of reviews. Reason why I'm doing this is because I have to focus on my studies for the moment. Sorry, but if I get a few dozen reviews, I'll post again. Until then!

Chapter 6: Attacks and Strange Magic

The Memory Charm, *Obliviate*, is a commonly used variant of the Legilimency Spell, *Legilimens*. The Memory Charm operates by forcibly slamming through whatever Occlumency shields the subject has utilizing the power put into the spell, and then selectively removing the memories of the user's choice, much like *Legilimens* attacks the mind for the user to view the memories. The removed memories are put into a small corner of the mind, hidden so the subject could not access them. Expert Obliviators, generally those skilled in Legilimency, could implant fake memories to cover up the Memory Charm.

The only way a person could retrieve their memories is through the Memory Charm Counter, *Commoneo*, which broke down all shields with a magic foreign to the subject. Unfortunately, for the counter to work, it had to have enough power to match the power put into the original Memory Charm. Memory Charms tended to dissolve after approximately a decade, but by then, it didn't really matter.

Contrary to popular belief, the Memory Charm still kept skills intact. For instance, even if someone Obliviated an Animagus to forget their power, they could still transform just as quickly as they could before. Provided that a person practiced a spell enough, the incantation and wand movement associated with it are implanted into the subconscious as a form of muscle memory.

Dumbledore did not first attack Harry's Occlumency shields to weaken them for the Memory Charm, as he believed his power to be more than enough to break through; after all, how could a mere boy of eleven hope to match his century and a half of experience?

He was right in that, at least. Harry alone did not have enough power behind his Occlumency to withstand a full-force assault from Dumbledore. However, Harry was not alone in his head. Quetzalcoatl was not the subject of the Obliviation, but he was perfectly capable of throwing his power alongside Harry's mental shields.

The strengthened Occlumency shields kept Dumbledore at bay for almost five straight minutes, but Quetzalcoatl's strength faded as Dumbledore relentlessly attacked the shields. Thankfully for Harry,

however, these five minutes tested Dumbledore's patience so much that when he finally broke through, Dumbledore didn't bother to view the memories he was removing, and so he just removed everything that had happened from the time he had left the Dursleys to the time he went to Hogwarts, filling it instead with vague memories of a slightly abused life with the Dursleys. He also removed the meeting in the office. Then he also implanted a sense of trust for the Headmaster.

Dumbledore had, after demolishing the shields, put a medium-power Memory Charm on Harry; one using all of his power would have completely obliterated his mind.

Quetzalcoatl had been completely drained, and it would take over two months without contact with Harry for him to fully recover. He only hoped that Harry wouldn't need him.

When Dumbledore was finished, it was almost time for the classes to start, so he revived Harry. "Harry, come back to me. Wake up."

Harry sat up groggily. "Eh? Did someone catch the number on that train?"

Dumbledore smiled, eyes twinkling. "I'm afraid you accidentally fell down the stairs from my office and bumped your head rather hard."

"That would explain the headache," Harry said with a groan.

"Here, let me take you to the Hospital Wing, and then you can go to your classes," Dumbledore offered.

Harry nodded absently, wondering why he felt like something was missing. When he confessed his feeling to Dumbledore, the Headmaster looked concerned. "Perhaps some temporary memory loss? Do you know who you are?"

"Harry Potter, resident Boy-Who-Lived."

"Where are we?"

"Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

“Are you left or right-handed?”

“Ambidextrous.”

“What house were you sorted into?”

“Slytherin.”

“Where did you live before you came here?”

“The Dursleys.” Harry felt a small sense of unease about that, but dismissed it; after all, he hated the Dursleys for the belittling treatment he’d received for the last ten years. It was only natural that he’d be uncomfortable talking about it.

Dumbledore smiled. “Good, then you remember all the important things. Perhaps the answer will come to you in time.” They arrived at the Hospital Wing then. “Ah, Poppy, Harry here needs a Headache Reliever, please.”

“Harry?” the woman, apparently the local doctor, asked. “My name is Madame Pomfrey, the Healer for Hogwarts.” She reached up, opened a cabinet, and pulled out a strange-looking mixture. “Drink up.”

Harry did so, then almost threw it back up. “Urgh! That tastes horrid!”

“But your headache’s gone,” Pomfrey pointed out.

Harry blinked. “You’re right,” he said in wonder.

Pomfrey ran her wand up and down. “You’re fine. Now get to class!”

“Yes ma’am,” Harry said politely before walking off to class, trying to figure out just what felt wrong. Coming up with nothing out of the ordinary, Harry shrugged, playing it off to his recent accident.

His first class was Transfiguration, according to his schedule. The class was a good one, Harry admitted; McGonagall had attracted the entire class to the branch of transfiguration by performing an undoubtedly difficult feat before setting them to work on the basics. *Although there was that slight hitch...*

Harry remembered how, on his first try, he managed to turn the match McGonagall had handed out into a needle. McGonagall had been shocked, but she wasn't the only one. Everyone else was looking at him either in surprise or outright dislike. Even Harry didn't know how he'd done it. He had the strange feeling that he'd done this somewhere before, but that couldn't be; after all, this was his first ever magic lesson.

Harry said as much to McGonagall when she called him to speak with her after class. The professor admitted to being shocked, and told Harry that it was exceedingly rare for anyone, Muggle-raised especially, to perform this branch of magic so quickly.

"I believe you have a natural talent for Transfiguration. Much like your father," McGonagall added.

"You knew my father?" Harry asked eagerly.

"Indeed I did. He was a Gryffindor in Hogwarts, and you could hardly see him without his group of friends. He was quite the troublemaker as well, always playing pranks. Thanks to him, the school's morale stayed high even during the war," McGonagall told Harry, reminiscing with a far-away look in her eyes. "He, too, had an inexplicable talent for Transfiguration. Why, if he'd put his mind to it, he could have become an Animagus, a person who can transform into an animal at will!"

Harry smiled. His father sounded like a wonderful person, and apparently he'd inherited more than just his looks. "Thank you, Professor, but I must get to class now."

"Of course, Mr. Potter. Off you go."

Harry then went off to History of Magic, which very quickly proved itself to be the most boring class Harry had ever attended. Somehow, though, he found himself awake and a little interested in the subject. *What's that old saying? Those who don't know their history are doomed to repeat it?* Harry took notes absently, noticing that there was only one other person who was capable of resisting the pure soporific power of Professor Binn's voice. *I could make good money selling this to insomniacs,* Harry thought wildly, hiding a chuckle.

Hmm. Not a bad idea. Magic can do anything, so I might want to look into that later. But who's the girl? He shifted his eyes to look over the girl, trying to identify her. *Ah, it's that girl I met on the train! Hermione, Hermione... Granger wasn't it? Looks smart enough to go into Ravenclaw. Wonder why she was sorted into Gryffindor? Then again, maybe she's got some bravery in there somewhere. No matter. I suppose it's a good thing she's not in Slytherin; she'd be eaten alive here. I've got a hard time, and I'm supposed to be famous.*

Soon enough, classes ended, and Harry went to the library to do his homework; after all, there were no guarantees in the Slytherin common room. He was finished fairly quickly; the teachers weren't really asking for much from the first years.

Once Harry was done, he sat back in one of the comfortable chairs and thought hard on what to do next. He wanted to go plan out his next prank, but he also wanted to find a way to prevent his things from being tampered with; Harry wasn't exactly Mr. Popular in Slytherin house. *Wards*, Harry's mind supplied.

Harry blinked, astonished. It was an ingenious idea, provided that Harry could find a book or something on the topic. So, quietly, Harry approached the librarian, whom he had gathered to be Madame Pince.

"Madame Pince?" Harry asked tentatively. "I was wondering if you could recommend a book of wards I could check out?"

Pince looked at Harry appraisingly. "Sorry, those are held in the Restricted Section due to the dangers of magical exhaustion. I'm afraid that making wards is just too much for anyone under sixth year. Wards is an optional topic offered by Professor Flitwick once you reach your NEWT years."

Harry sighed. "Rats," he muttered. *There goes that idea.* He returned to the Slytherin common room before retreating to his dorm. A quick glance at his possessions let him know that nothing had been touched. Harry opened his trunk and was promptly shocked. He remembered buying just the books necessary for the first year, certainly not the Standard Book of Spells for first through seventh years! And he remembered wanting to buy that book on curses to

practice on Dudley, but Hagrid had dragged him away from it! What was going on?

He checked to make sure that it was still his trunk he was looking through, and sure enough it was. *This is getting a little weird.* Harry sat down on his bed to think it out. The best conclusion he could come up with was simply that he had an ally somewhere in Slytherin who had given him the books anonymously so as to keep from being known. It was either that, or the books were cursed.

Harry quickly glanced around himself, and pointed his wand at the books in his trunk. "*Finite Incantatem?*" Harry tried. Nothing happened. Harry fought with himself, trying to decide if the chance of greater learning was worth the risk of getting cursed. *I suppose I can go visit the infirmary if something happens...* Harry thought hesitantly. He took a deep breath and grasped the topmost book. To his great relief, nothing happened. More relaxed, Harry sat back and began to rummage around for his *Standard Book of Spells: Year One*. He began rereading it; he'd finished it at the Dursleys of course, while waiting for September first. But as he read, he got the odd feeling that he knew these spells, that he could perform them.

After basically ignoring Malfoy for a bit – Draco was trying to get Harry to become his underling – Harry went to bed. As he finished undressing, he came across a strange bag that he'd been carrying. *Come to think of it, I got all my books out of this thing. I certainly don't recall buying that... perhaps it's part of my memory loss. A bag that can hold more than it looks could come in handy.*

Over the next few weeks, Harry went to classes, and was top of the class in practical – much to Hermione Granger's frustration – while Hermione was the best in theory. Harry had no idea why the spells just worked for him; he had the strange feeling that he'd learned magic somewhere before Hogwarts, but that couldn't be. He'd lived with the magic-hating Dursleys for the majority of his life.

And then there were the little things that had Harry confused. Why did he have a snake tattoo on his arm? When did that happen? And what was that blade tattoo on his lower back? Surely something like that would have stayed in his memory.

After classes, Harry occasionally found his stuff strewn about the dorm in an obvious attempt to make him miserable. It was working. He had no friends – Harry was trying to become Hermione's friend, but she'd been infected by the Anti-Slytherin sentiment – and Harry still couldn't remember just what had happened in Dumbledore's office that day. And abuse even in his own house? It was getting to be too much for Harry. *Is this the punishment of being open-minded?* Harry asked himself sadly as he picked up his things for the seventh time in the last week and a half. *Just because I was willing to consider Slytherin to be a good house?*

Harry found that he was actually fairly good at brewing potions, but even so, that didn't stop his Head of House from taking points from him for very unfair reasons, which only caused Slytherin house to hate him all the more. Snape *always* favored Slytherin, and never took points... until now.

Did I offend some cosmic deity? Harry wondered after another Double Potions with the Gryffindors. Some stupid Gryffindor had tossed in a Filibuster Firework into Harry's potion. Sabotaging Harry's potion had become a new pastime for the Gryffindors, as it was the one thing that Snape didn't take points off them for.

The only thing that cheered Harry up was playing pranks. No one was safe, as Harry targeted everyone. Most of his pranks took place in the morning, and not all of them were magical in origin. Once, he'd gotten Peeves to help him by hanging several magically-enlarged buckets of ice cold lake water above the doors to the Great Hall. They were held up by a timed-release Levitation Charm. Suffice to say that dozens of students were drenched.

Fred and George, of course, were looking for the culprit. They were the ones being blamed for these pranks, no matter how many times they pled innocent. It seemed their reputation was working against them for the moment. Harry almost felt guilty. Almost. Any shred of guilt that Harry possessed for them vanished when the Weasley twins cornered him in the halls one day nearing the end of September.

"Why, if it isn't the traitor," one twin commented.

Harry clenched his fists angrily. "I am no traitor," he bit out. "It's not my fault you all expected me to be a Gryffindor. I live up to no one's expectations but my own. Now, if all you're going to do is insult me, I have better things to do with my time." He turned to leave, but he suddenly found himself against the wall, held there by two heavily-muscled arms belonging to the twins. Harry looked at them, not with fear, but with sadness and resignation. "Why?" was all he asked.

"Because you're a Slytherin," the twins said together.

"Hey George? Why don't we stick him to the ceiling for a while with a Silencing Charm?"

"Excellent idea, Fred. Best make it one of those empty rooms that people rarely use."

Harry grew angry again. With a tremendous surge of strength he grabbed the arms pinning him to the wall and twisted them so the twins' backs were to him. Their arms were behind their back, pulled to the point that if Harry wished, he could cause a great amount of pain. "What makes a Slytherin so different from everybody else that you think nothing of causing emotional and psychological pain?" Harry demanded. "Didn't you hear the Sorting Hat? I have the qualities of all four houses! The Sorting Hat left the choice up to me! Just because I chose to be sorted in that house means that I'm automatically evil?"

"Then why didn't you choose Gryffindor?" one of the twins asked painfully.

"Because I want to prove that Slytherin doesn't mean evil," Harry said shortly. "I want to get rid of all this stupid prejudice between the houses. I want to get rid of egotistical closed-minded jerks like you who don't want to see things from any other viewpoint than their own. Have either of you ever thought about what it's like to be me?" Harry asked. Without waiting for an answer, Harry shoved the two Gryffindors away from him. "Don't bother me again unless you have a very good reason, or else the results will not be... pleasant." He stalked off, his robes almost seeming to meld to his shadow.

Fred and George looked at each other. "He's not a normal Slytherin," Fred finally said.

"Yeah," George agreed. "Didn't attack us until we threatened him. Most Slytherins don't need that excuse, since Snape'll give them points left and right."

"D'ya reckon he's right? About Slytherin not immediately meaning evil, I mean?" Fred asked.

"Well, I suppose so. If it did, then we'd have had many more Dark Lords in the last few hundred years. I mean, Grindelwald and You-Know-Who are the only two I've heard of for the last three centuries. Hogwarts has been around for over a thousand years," George thought aloud.

Fred was beginning to feel a little guilty. Had he persecuted innocents in the war against Slytherin? "But most of the people we prank deserve it, right?" he asked his twin, trying to reassure himself.

"Yeah," George agreed, though he too looked unsure.

"Maybe we should hold off on the pranks until we do some reconnaissance," Fred suggested. "See who the gits who deserve it are, and see who would find the humor in our pranks?"

George smiled at the solution. "Right." He paused. "What do you reckon Potter meant about what it's like to be him?"

"I dunno," Fred said slowly. "But one thing's for sure; we leave him alone in our pranks. I have the feeling that there's something big going on around him, and Potter's right in the middle of it."

Flying practice, which Madame Hooch had delayed from the third week of September due to an unexpected opportunity to referee a professional game, finally came. Harry glanced at the announcement boards; they had flying with the Gryffindors. *Why is it always the Gryffindors?* Harry thought to himself miserably. *I get to make a fool of myself in front of both Weasley and Malfoy, who've no doubt got experience thanks to their "pureblooded" families.*

As the Slytherin first years went outside for the class, Harry glanced at the broomstick he'd been assigned. It looked rather old, and several twigs were frayed and sticking out at odd angles.

“Welcome to flying practice,” Madame Hooch said sternly. “To call your broomstick to you, put your wand hand over it and say ‘up’ with authority.”

Harry nodded. “Up!” His broomstick flew right into his hand, and Harry smiled. He glanced around but noticed that he was one of the few who had gotten it on their first try. Malfoy’s had as well, but Hermione Granger’s wasn’t doing anything. Neville Longbottom’s broom had simply rolled over. Weasley’s smacked him in the face, much to Harry’s amusement, while Crabbe’s and Goyle’s brooms had jerked a little.

Harry walked over to Hermione, who was close to where he originally was anyway, and heard her increasingly frustrated attempts to levitate her broomstick. Harry thought he had the answer. “Hermione, try treating the broom like it’s a dog. Think of it as something living yet obedient. You have to command it gently, not just yell at it.”

Hermione looked sharply beside her, apparently not having heard Harry approach. Frowning her face up in concentration, she once again ordered “Up!” This time the broom jumped into her hand. She gave Harry a small smile, which Harry returned.

“Potter!” Weasley exclaimed. “Get away from Hermione, you slimy Slytherin!”

“What are you doing with the mudblood, Potter?” Malfoy demanded.

“Five points from Gryffindor and Slytherin,” Madame Hooch said imperiously. “And ten points to Mr. Potter for helping Miss Granger with her broomstick.” Weasley and Malfoy looked furious, but kept silent. Harry once again was struck by the irony that they were more alike than they thought. “Mr. Potter’s idea is exactly right. You must treat your broomstick with a measure of respect, like a beloved pet, for it to cooperate.”

Harry returned to his place in line, awaiting the next instructions. Madame Hooch showed them how to hold the broomstick without falling off. Harry suppressed a smirk when she told Malfoy he’d been doing it wrong for years. “Right. Now when I blow the whistle, jump

hard and pull slightly up on the handle and you will rise slowly. Push back down and you will land. Now... get back down here!"

Poor Neville was so nervous that he had already pushed up, hard, and was rising quickly upwards. He rose very high – *a dangerous height*, Harry thought to himself – and went quite some distance before slipping off his broomstick. Without thinking, Harry pushed off himself and gripped his broomstick, which shot forward like a javelin.

This was *easy*, Harry realized. This was something that he felt natural doing, something he was good at. He felt at home up here in the air. Catching himself and returning to the task at hand, Harry flattened himself against the broom and pulled up at the same time, trying to meet with Neville's falling path. "Come on," Harry whispered. "We've got to catch him!"

The broom lurched forward to an even faster speed and Harry squinted forward. *Almost there... three, two, one, gotcha!* Harry's left hand struck out like a snake and managed to grab Neville's sturdy cloak, which held for a moment but then tore. "Shit!" Harry cursed before going into a steep dive until he was right beside Neville. They were not far from the ground now. Snatching the clumsy boy with his left hand, Harry pulled him onto the broom behind him. "Hold on tight," Harry said roughly, and Neville clung to him as Harry pulled up. He could feel the broom protesting. "Come on, broom, you can do this," he murmured, almost in prayer, as he felt the broom respond.

Harry pulled up from the ground with less than an inch to spare; his feet almost dragged on the ground. Pulling up so sharply had Harry almost vertical, so Harry quickly leveled off and then began a gentle descent back to the ground where the others were waiting. All the Gryffindors minus Ron were cheering, while the Slytherins looked angry, with the exceptions of Daphne Greengrass and Theodore Nott, who both had small smiles on their faces.

When he landed, Neville leapt off the broom and kissed the ground. "I'm so sorry, Harry. I just lost control of the broom!"

Harry managed a smile, breathing hard and adrenaline still coursing through his veins. "No worries. Just warn me next time you pull a stunt like that, ok?"

“HARRY POTTER!” the shrill voice of Madame Hooch screeched as she returned on a broomstick of her own. Harry looked down, dismounting. *Am I going to be in trouble? That’s not fair! I save Neville’s life and I’m going to be punished for it?*

“I never... in all my days as Flying Instructor...” Madame Hooch kept trying to form the right words to adequately express what she felt, but she appeared to be failing miserably. She settled for “Was that your first time on a broom?” Harry nodded solemnly. She gaped openly, but was saved from response as none other than Severus Snape walked outside, robes billowing.

Snape squinted against the sun. “If I may borrow Potter?”

Hooch nodded. Harry suppressed the urge to swallow hard as he followed his Head of House inside and through the halls to the Charms corridor. *What’s going to happen to me?* Snape had taken points off for less. Was he going to be expelled?

Snape opened one door, where apparently Flitwick was teaching. “Filius, I need to borrow Flint for a few moments?”

Flitwick blinked. “Now?”

“Now.”

“Alright then. Off you go, Mr. Flint.”

Flint came out, and Snape closed the door. “Flint, I believe I have found us our new Seeker.”

Flint looked over at Harry. “Potter? Not a bad build, but why him?”

“He just had his flying lessons today, and during his first time on a broom he showed much more promise than Higgs. He pulled off a one hundred foot dive, saving one of the idiotic Gryffindors, and landed without a scratch using one of the school brooms. If there is one thing about James Potter I must praise, it is his flying skills. It seems his son retains that talent.”

Flint whirled on Harry, scowling. “You saved a Gryffindor? Why?”

Harry raised an eyebrow, knowing that he couldn't divulge his original noble reason. Thankfully, though, he had thought of a back-up meant for the Slytherins. "It was the perfect opportunity to get on the Gryffindors' good sides. That makes me privy to more information they may have, as I become more trusted. It also means Longbottom owes me a favor, which I may collect at my convenience."

Flint smiled wickedly. "A perfectly Slytherin reason. Fine, you're on the team. Professor, we're going to need to get him a good broom to take full advantage of this talent. A Nimbus 2000 or maybe the latest Cleansweep."

Snape nodded in agreement. "And I shall see what I can do to get around the first year restriction against owning one's own broom." He turned to Harry. "I've become rather accustomed to the Quidditch trophy in my office. Make sure it stays there." There was the silent addition of "or else" that everyone heard. Harry nodded quickly.

That night, Flint made a public announcement to the Slytherin house naming Harry the new Slytherin Seeker. "He is not to be harmed. Anyone who dares harm him shall face the wrath of the Slytherin Quidditch team, and Professor Snape himself," Flint said dangerously.

Harry suddenly realized that his vital position as Slytherin Seeker just assured him safe passage in Slytherin until the end of the Quidditch season. No one in Slytherin would dare harm him very badly and risk the anger of the Potions Master, and everyone wanted Slytherin to win the Quidditch Cup again, naturally.

Of course, Malfoy had to put his two cents in. "I didn't realize that the flying lesson was actually the tryouts for the team! If I had, then I wouldn't have held back!"

"Shut it, Malfoy," Flint growled. "Potter proved himself to be a true Slytherin back there; he saved that idiot to get more information in the long run, not to mention a life debt! You, on the other hand, profess your undying hatred for Gryffindors so much that you're not likely to gain nearly as much information as Potter here."

Harry suppressed a grin at the look on Malfoy's face. *Take that, Malfoy!* He almost didn't hear Flint's next words.

“Our first practice is next Monday at four thirty in the morning,” Flint informed Harry. “Be there on time, or else.”

Harry merely nodded; for some reason, his body always insisted on waking around that time anyway and by then he was fully rested; it wasn't too much of a stretch to wake up half an hour earlier to dress. “Understood.”

“Good. Until then, Potter.” Flint walked away.

“Why did Snape let *you* on the team?” Malfoy demanded. “He *hates* you! You're the only Slytherin he takes points from regularly!”

Harry shrugged. “Professor Snape did mention something about my father and his flying skills. If I remember correctly, it went something along the lines of ‘if there's one thing I must praise about James Potter, it's his flying skills. Apparently his son retains the talent.’” Harry glanced at Terence Higgs, the former Slytherin Seeker he'd just replaced. Higgs appeared relieved. “What's up with him? You'd think Higgs would be mad that I just replaced him on the Quidditch team.”

A third year passing by heard him and turned around. “Actually, you just did him a favor. Flint basically bullied Higgs onto the team last year because he was the only decent one in the Seeker tryouts. And Flint, I hear, runs our Quidditch team ragged in training. I reckon Higgs is relieved because now he'll get more sleep and time to study for his NEWT exams.”

“Ah,” Harry said in understanding, before moving on to get some of his homework done.

That Friday, Harry received his new broomstick and a note that read:

Potter,

This is your new Nimbus 2000. I expect you to win against the Gryffindors in the upcoming match.

Severus Snape

Of course, Weasley saw the broom-shaped package fly to Harry and immediately turned to the nearest teacher, which turned out to be Flitwick. "Professor, Potter's got a broomstick!"

"So he does," Flitwick said with a small smile. "Mr. Potter proved his worth saving Mr. Longbottom during the flying lesson, so Professor Snape managed to convince the Headmaster to allow an exception to the first year rule. It's good to see at least one person willing to see past the house boundaries."

Weasley fumed; he was willing to swear that Potter was evil. After all, all Slytherins were evil, weren't they? *You-Know-Who was a Slytherin, and he was evil. So were many of the Death Eaters. So, yes, they're all evil.*

Ron Weasley was, unfortunately, the leader of the rumor mill at Hogwarts. He was the one who started the rumors, while the gossips spread it around. He had, the night after the flying lesson, boldly declared that Potter was evil, and that he saved Neville in the hopes of gaining information through him. "He'll betray us all and become the next Dark Lord!" Ron had said dramatically. Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown had quickly spread the word. Most believed these rumors.

Thankfully, not everyone felt that way. Neville was solidly behind Harry, while Hermione was still unsure. She'd already had several Slytherins picking on her because she wasn't of wizard origin, but Harry was never one of them. In fact, when Draco Malfoy had called her "mudblood" Harry had glared at him and then looked at her apologetically, as if saying "Sorry, I can't do anything about him, but I certainly don't feel that way." *Or is he just trying to fool us all into thinking he's good, and then betray us?* She somehow found that unlikely, but she wasn't willing to trust her own emotions on this subject. She had no friends, as of yet, and thought that maybe she was getting desperate and reading too far into people's actions. Nevertheless, she reserved judgment.

Fred and George apologized to Harry in private, finding him in the library that same day. "Sorry, Potter. We thought you were like the other Slytherins."

Harry laughed bitterly. "You mean like Malfoy and the 'pureblooded and proud of it' group? Yeah, I see that. Now do you see that not all Slytherins are evil?"

"Yeah," Fred answered quietly.

"We did a little spying around, observing the Slytherins to see who needed to be pranked," George admitted. "Lots of Slytherins do, but not all."

"As long as you know how to differentiate between those who deserve everything they have coming to them, and the misunderstood ones," Harry said sternly.

Harry's first Quidditch practice was, shortly put, disturbing. Flint and most of his teammates, save for Harry, were big and bulky, almost going for size and strength over all. This had made Harry feel a little self-conscious, but that quickly disappeared when Flint had them all down doing push-ups.

After twenty, Harry was still going strong, while a quick glance at the others showed him that they were weakening. *What's going on? Harry asked himself. I don't remember being this strong! Where did all this muscle come from? How is this possible?* It was then that Harry began to have his suspicions. These only grew when Harry, with minimal effort, completed all of Flint's physical tasks.

The flying aspect Harry had little trouble with. He felt as though he was born to fly, and his new Nimbus 2000 responded to his lightest touch. It was, quite simply, a great broom. Flint was very impressed by Harry's performance that morning, and used him as an example to the "big brutes" on the team.

After a repeat performance during the next practice, Harry went to Dumbledore, very confused to this unexpected strength. Dumbledore, however, had merely smiled, confident in his Memory Charm. "You are very strong magically, as you have no doubt noticed," he said sagely. "I believe that when you first started consciously tapping into it, your magic reacted to improve your body. The better shape your body is in, some theorists believe, the more magic you had channel without harming yourself."

Harry believed him; after all, Dumbledore was a great and wise wizard! Why would he steer Harry wrong?

The rest of October passed fairly quickly in a whirlwind of admittedly easy classes and Quidditch. Harry was glad not to have worry about his safety in his own house, but he still had no friends. Over the last few weeks, Harry had made acquaintances of Blaise Zabini, Theodore Nott and Daphne Greengrass, but they barely knew each other.

Harry wanted to make friends with Hermione, but the Gryffindor was still skittish around him, almost as if she was afraid of believing that Harry *wanted* to be her friend. Harry couldn't understand it at all; Hermione, he observed, was ostracized by the rest of her house because of her cleverness and book-smarts. Ron Weasley had often complained of her nagging him to do his homework. He ignored her, of course, which was the reason for his low grades.

Harry, during the whole while, had the strange unsettling feeling that he was supposed to be *doing* something, something very important. He confessed that to Dumbledore as well, but Dumbledore merely told him not to worry, everything important was taken care of. That alleviated Harry's fears a little, but he couldn't help but think that Dumbledore had overlooked something.

For one thing, Harry's scar was acting up every now and then, especially when near Professor Quirrell. Harry was suspicious of him, because one thing he knew for certain was that his scar was a direct link to Voldemort. He didn't know how he knew this, considering that he hadn't even heard of the name until he came to the wizarding society, but he knew it nevertheless.

Suddenly, it was Halloween. Classes that afternoon were excited, but there was one bump. In the halls between classes, he overheard two Gryffindors talking. Pressing his back against the wall in an attempt to remain unseen, he heard them talking.

"I'm telling you, Lavender, I don't know why that girl's taking it so badly. She's been at Hogwarts almost two whole months with Ron!"

"I imagine it's harder to make friends when you think yourself smarter than them," Lavender commented. "Granger would have had an easier time if she would lighten up a bit and have fun every now and then."

"That's still no reason to be hiding out in the girls' bathroom all day after Charms!" Parvati insisted.

"She just needs some time to cry," Lavender said soothingly. "She'll be out soon, and who knows? Maybe Ron'll try and make it up to her."

The voices faded from Harry's hearing, but Harry was seething. From what he understood, Ron had upset Hermione so much that she had skipped classes to cry all day in the girls' bathroom. *I'll kill him*, Harry thought to himself angrily, stalking off to the Great Hall for the feast with his robes seeming to melt to his shadow. He didn't go after Hermione because of two things: firstly, she was in a girl's bathroom, and no matter how brave Harry might be, he was *not* going to go into a girl's bathroom unless absolutely necessary; secondly, Hermione had rejected all of Harry's attempts at being a friend. To not respect her wishes would make it look like Harry ignored Hermione's feelings, which was what had put her in this situation to begin with.

Harry was still fuming when he entered the Great Hall for the feast with the other Slytherins. Most people seemed to sense his approaching wrath, and gave him a small bubble of personal space. Harry glared directly at the redheaded figure of Ron Weasley, who almost wilted under the fiery gaze of those emerald orbs. If looks could kill, Ron would have not only been dead, but his spirit would have been destroyed or at least heavily harmed. *Perhaps Nearly Headless Nick needs a companion?* Harry thought in malicious amusement.

Unknown to Harry, Quetzalcoatl was progressing quite nicely in recuperating. Unfortunately, he still did not have the strength to communicate to Harry, but he could watch. He knew, on the other hand, that he had to be very careful when he did first communicate with Harry. If his recent actions were anything to go by, Harry would

talk to Dumbledore about the worrying voice in his head, and things would go to hell in a hand basket.

The feast was nice, in Harry's opinion, all the way until Quirrell burst in, a very pale look on his face. "Troll!" he yelled. "Troll in the dungeons!" He stopped, almost seeming unsteady on his feet. "Thought you ought to know." He collapsed.

There was instantaneous panic as everyone tried to get up and run. Dumbledore called out for silence, and then there was. Everyone froze. "Prefects, lead your Houses to the dormitories immediately!"

The prefects appeared to be in their element. Harry saw as the oldest Weasley at Gryffindor easily grouped them all up and led them out. Flint was doing the same with the Slytherins, except instead of using reassurances, he was using threats.

Wait! Harry suddenly realized. *Hermione doesn't know!* Harry ducked out of line, managing to avoid the watchful eye of Flint, and ran in the direction of the girl's bathroom.

Suddenly, Harry heard three sets of footsteps following him. He turned around, fully prepared to explain himself to the teachers, but saw Blaise, Theodore and Daphne following him. "What the hell are you doing?" he hissed.

"What are *you* doing?" Daphne retorted.

"I'm going to alert Hermione Granger of the troll," Harry said simply. "Don't get in my way!"

"Is this the same Hermione that you've been trying to befriend?" Blaise said simply.

"Yes," Harry admitted. "Now either get going, or come with me!"

"Are you insane?" Theodore asked with a slightly manic grin. "I'm coming with you! You might need backup, and we Slytherin outcasts need to stick together!"

Daphne sighed. "Looks like I'm coming too, since I need to make sure you two don't do anything stupid like get caught."

"I shall come as well," Blaise added. He didn't give a reason.

Harry scowled. "Fine. Come on, then!"

Harry led them to the girl's bathroom quickly, where they suddenly heard a scream from within. Theo yanked open the door and everyone was treated to the sight of Hermione crouching underneath the sinks while the troll was smashing things left and right with his massive club.

Harry quickly thought of something. "Distract it!" he ordered his companions. "I'll get rid of its weapon!"

The Slytherins nodded and started pelting the troll with spells. None of them seemed to be having much effect through the tough troll hide, though. "*Wingardium Leviosa!*" Harry cried out, pointing at the club, but just then, the troll brought it smashing down, so the spell missed. "*Wingardium Leviosa!*" The Disarming Charm, *Expelliarmus*, wouldn't work, Harry noticed as Blaise coolly tried it against the brute, so Harry kept his hopes on levitating the club.

Hermione screamed once more as the troll brought the club smashing down. She had nowhere to run. The scream seemed to trigger something in Harry, as he felt his magic flare and he started moving of his own accord. In an almost too familiar fashion, Harry pointed his right hand at the troll. "Stop!"

A black-and-white checkered spell rushed at the troll, making it freeze instantaneously in mid-swing. "Hermione, come 'ere!" Harry motioned quickly. "I don't know how long it'll stay that way!"

Hermione scampered away from the troll and clutched onto Harry tightly, crying. Harry pulled her close, running one hand through her bushy hair. "It's all right, it's all right," he murmured. "You're safe."

The other Slytherins, in the meantime, finished picking up their jaws. "What the hell was that, Potter?" Daphne growled.

"A Stop spell," Harry said simply. "He should be like that for several minutes, but I'm not certain how long it'll last because of his thick magic-resistant hide. Let's get out of here." Harry had no idea how he knew that. It was almost as if his magic was telling him.

"I concur," Blaise agreed.

"We should avoid the teachers," Theo added. "They might think we're molesting this poor girl."

Hermione, for the first time, seemed to notice that they were all Slytherins. "You're Slytherins!"

"Yeah. Point being?" Daphne asked bluntly.

"Why are you being so kind to me, a Muggleborn?" Hermione demanded, wiping away her tears and moving a little away from Harry.

Harry sighed, drawing her attention. "Hermione, I've got nothing against Muggleborns. Hell, my mother was one."

"I hold no grudge against those of Muggle descent," Blaise said formally. "Muggles are better than wizards in some aspects, while wizards are better at others. To be magical with Muggle ancestry allows you a chance at both worlds, I'm sure."

Theo and Daphne shrugged. "We're purebloods, but we don't have any ill will against Muggleborns," Theo stated.

"As a result, we're not exactly Mr. Popular in Slytherin," Daphne said bitterly. "And then the rest of the school labels us as evil just because we're different than them. Not a good situation."

Harry looked at the Slytherins in a new light. They were the same as him! Then he realized that the troll was slowly beginning to move again. "Um, we need to go now," he said, pointing at the troll. He led them out, just in time to run into McGonagall and Snape.

"What are you all doing here?" McGonagall demanded.

“Saving Hermione,” Harry said bluntly. “She didn’t know, so I came to warn her. These three,” he said, waving to the Slytherins, “joined me. Together we managed to stop the troll long enough to get Hermione out of there. The troll’s still in there, and it’s regaining its power of movement. You might want to finish it off while you’ve got the chance.”

“Just how did you delay it?” Snape demanded with a sneer. “I find it highly unlikely that a bunch of first years could match a fully grown mountain troll.”

The Slytherins and Hermione were behind Harry, unconsciously recognizing him as their leader. Harry had to choose his next words carefully. “Despite what you may think, Professor, I’m skilled at more than just flaunting my name.”

Snape gave the patented “Snape Glare of Doom” but it had no effect on Harry. “Five points from Slytherin for your cheek, Potter. Now tell me what...” he was interrupted by the troll roaring in rage and swinging its club into and through the door.

Harry, who had been expecting this to happen any second, dove to one side, bringing Hermione with him. They just managed to get under the club. As it was, Snape was hit by the club and went flying into a wall, falling unconscious. The other Slytherins and McGonagall were far enough away to avoid the club.

McGonagall brandished her wand. She silently sent a spell at the club, and suddenly the club was gone. Hermione’s eyes widened as she saw that. “The Vanishing spell,” she recognized.

“Indeed. Five points to Gryffindor for recognizing fifth year magic,” McGonagall said calmly. With another wand movement, she shot a red spell at the troll. She looked unsurprised, but grim when the troll remained standing.

Hermione opened her mouth, but Harry beat her to it. “That’s the Stunner.”

“Yes it is. Five points to Slytherin.” She shot another spell at the troll, but it seemed to have recovered from the shock of losing its weapon.

The troll barreled down on McGonagall, who hastily conjured a stone barrier in front of her. The troll smashed through it and hit McGonagall, but the impact was lessened after going through the stone. It appeared McGonagall was merely knocked out, not hurt badly.

"Now what?" Daphne asked sarcastically.

"Run!" Theo yelled. Without a second thought, everyone started running, the troll right behind them.

"Let's review what we know," Blaise said between gasps.

"The troll's resistant to magic," Harry said thoughtfully; he was having little trouble speaking while running.

"It's frightfully strong," Hermione added.

"But they're also stupid," Theo pointed out.

Harry suddenly realized he could cast Stop again. "Oh, what the hell are we doing?" he groaned. "Stop!" he yelled, pointing his free hand at the troll. Something told him that it wouldn't be wise to use it with his wand.

The troll once again stopped in its tracks. "Now if only we could knock it out somehow," Daphne said wistfully.

"None of our spells are strong enough," Theo added remorsefully.

"But Harry's are," Blaise said calmly.

"And just what do you suggest I cast?" Harry asked seriously. He was the only one who could directly affect the troll apparently.

"Do you have any other spells like that Stop one?" Theo asked eagerly.

Harry closed his eyes, but snapped them open a moment later. "Holy shit..."

"You do?!" Daphne asked incredulously.

"Yeah. Loads of them. Stand back," Harry ordered. He raised his wand. "I'm not sure if it'll affect the troll while it's still under the effects of Stop, so I'll wait until it's moving again." After only a minute, the troll lurched forward again. "Sleep!"

From his wand emerged a spray of milky-white that hit the troll directly. The troll halted, rubbing its eyes with a yawn. And then it fell over, fast asleep. Hermione cheered quietly, while Theo gave Harry a clap on the back. Daphne smirked, and Blaise allowed a pleased smile to appear on his face. "We must see if the teachers require medical attention," Blaise reminded the others.

"Right. Daphne, you go get Madame Pomfrey in the hospital wing," Harry ordered. "Hermione, you should go with her. Theodore, Blaise and I will do what we can for the Professors."

Harry suddenly realized that they had no reason to be following his orders. All he had done was knock out a troll with a spell that they apparently couldn't do. And yet his fellow students listened to him and did as he said. *Strange...*

Harry, Theo and Blaise ran back to the teachers. McGonagall's shoulder, left arm and head were bleeding lightly. Harry put one hand over her. "I've another spell perfect for this. Cure." McGonagall's cuts mended and she now appeared to just be knocked out.

Theo had gone to Snape and gasped. "Harry! Get over here!"

Harry rushed over and gasped himself. Snape was bleeding profusely in several places. Harry was no doctor, but he could tell that Snape's arm and perhaps a few ribs were broken. He would die if he didn't get medical attention promptly, Harry could see by the amount of blood on the floor. Placing both hands above Snape, he cried "Cura!"

Snape's ribs mended themselves visibly, and his arm fixed itself. Then the chunk of skin that the club had torn off regenerated mostly. Snape's paler face than normal regained some color, so Harry believed that the spell had focused on getting some more blood into the system. Snape was still bleeding, so Harry cast another Cure spell, which healed Snape the rest of the way.

Snape groaned and sat up. Harry pushed him back down. "You need to keep lying down," Harry said seriously. "I healed what I could, but you were very badly hurt. Wait for Madame Pomfrey. Daphne Greengrass is fetching her at the moment."

"He's right, sir," Theo confirmed.

"Failure to comply may result in worse injuries," Blaise reminded Snape.

"Is the troll dead?" Snape asked bluntly, eyes locking on to Harry's.

"No," Harry said honestly. "Just knocked out."

Snape, who had been reading Harry's surface thoughts, saw that he was telling the truth. "How grievous were my injuries?"

"You had a broken arm, a few broken ribs, a chunk of skin ripped out of you, and you were bleeding to death," Harry informed him.

Snape was surprised to find that Harry was telling the truth on that as well. "You have no medical training! How did you heal me?"

Harry colored and looked away. "I'd rather not divulge that information. I'm not quite sure how either. Besides," Harry added, turning his eyes back onto Snape's, "I'm not sure I got it all. Just wait for Madame Pomfrey."

"How is Minerva?"

"Professor McGonagall?" Harry asked. Snape nodded. "She's fine. She had a few scrapes, but I healed those quick enough. She Vanished the troll's weapon, and lessened the impact of the troll's charge by conjuring a stone wall."

"I assume you and the other first years knocked out the troll?" Snape asked rhetorically. Now it was Harry's turn to nod. "How?"

"Harry used a Sleep spell on it," Theo answered for Harry.

"It seems Harry has enough magical power to punch through the troll's resistant hide," Blaise added dryly.

"And just *why* did you attack the troll?" Snape asked with a false patience.

Harry held up a hand, sticking one finger in the air. "Firstly, it was threatening my friends and allies. Secondly, it was about to kill you and McGonagall. What better way to get on your good sides than saving your lives?"

"A perfectly Slytherin reason. For saving my life and incapacitating the troll, I award Slytherin fifty points," Snape said after a moment. *Perhaps Potter isn't so bad after all. He saved my life when he could have easily left me for dead. I wonder if he would have done that without that Memory Charm Dumbledore put on him?*

He wanted to assume no, but he knew that the Memory Charm could not change the innate personality. Snape knew full well that Potter would have done the same thing for him, provided he had no reason not to. On the other hand, Snape realized, he had made Potter an enemy by attacking him that day in Diagon Alley when all Potter probably wanted was to know another face just in case he needed to know something.

Snape shook his head of such thoughts. *In any case, now I owe two life debts to Potter. One from his father passed down, and another newly created.* He would have sighed if it wouldn't have detracted from his reputation.

Hermione, Daphne and Madame Pomfrey appeared from around the corner then. Madame Pomfrey rushed over to Snape, raising her glowing wand and running it back and forth over his body. Then, with a perplexed look on her face, she did it again. "I'm reading that you had three broken ribs, one broken arm, and massive internal bleeding, but I'm also reading two healing spells, one seeming to be a stronger version of the other. Who cast these?"

"That would be me," Harry volunteered.

"Impressive. What spells did you use?"

"I'm not sure. I just wanted him healed, and my wand did the rest," Harry lied. *I want to get to the bottom of this before I start talking about it.*

No one contradicted Harry. Madame Pomfrey did one last check before telling Snape he was free to go. She woke McGonagall up after checking her, and explained what had happened. "You're unhurt, so you're free to go."

Then Madame Pomfrey turned to Harry. "You may be a natural for healing, Mr. Potter. If you would like, I can teach you what I know."

"I'd love that!" Harry said enthusiastically. *I might not always be able to depend on Cure, Cura and Curaga. Or I might need to heal someone without revealing that ability.*

"Unfortunately, training with me will have to wait until at least your second year," Madame Pomfrey said apologetically. "First years need to learn the theory and get started on their spell-casting. Healing is very precise art, so we can't afford to make big mistakes."

Harry nodded, a little disappointed at having to wait, but still excited at getting a chance to learn from the school healer. As they walked back, Daphne muttered, "Lucky bastard."

"Why?"

"Madame Pomfrey is one of the best Healers around," Daphne informed him, sounding almost shocked to know that Harry didn't already know. "During the summer, she's Head Healer at Saint Mungo's, the wizarding hospital."

"She rarely takes on apprentices," Theo added with a serious look on his face. "But those she accepts are usually able to get a job easily at Saint Mungo's after graduation. And those who don't want that are accepted almost everywhere that needs a healing ability."

"Wow!" Hermione whispered, listening to everything she heard; after all, she was Muggleborn, so she wouldn't know this.

"A few, I've heard, became Unspeakables for the Department of Mysteries in the Ministry of Magic," Daphne added with a touch of respect. "Though technically, the Department of Mysteries works outside the Ministry of Magic."

"What does an Unspeakable do?" Harry asked.

"No one knows," Blaise said solemnly. "Their work is very secret."

"Interesting," Harry murmured. He silently filed the information for future inspection, and then renewed his search for answers. *Why can I cast these spells, but others, purebloods even, don't recognize them? I have 998 stock of Cure, and 999 stock of Cura, which means I can cast each that many times before I'm out. But why do I have a limit on this kind of spells instead of other spells? Why can I cast these wandlessly? I feel as though I should know this, but like there's a block keeping me from it! Why?*

"Um, Blaise?" Harry asked slowly. "Are there spells that manipulate memories?"

"Yes, the Memory Charm can erase or change memories."

Theo whirled on Harry. "Don't tell me you've got a Memory Charm on you!"

Harry nodded ever so slowly. "I think so. But who would do that? And why?"

"It can't have been a Death Eater supporter," Daphne said flatly. "Instead of selectively Memory Charming you, they would have outright killed you and made it look like an accident."

"That takes out most of Slytherin, then," Harry concluded.

"Are there any, I don't know, gaps in your memory?" Theo asked.

"As a matter of fact, yeah there is," Harry realized. "After the first day of classes, Dumbledore called me up to his office, but I can't remember any of it!" His suspicion grew when he realized that Dumbledore had made no effort to inform Harry of what had occurred

during that time. "He told me that I fell down the stairs and knocked myself out, giving myself amnesia!" He thought hard. "And come to think of it, I can't really remember what I learned while at Muggle school!"

Daphne and Theo traded looks. "Yeah, you've been Obliviated," Theo said heavily.

"Obliviated?" Hermione asked timidly.

"It's what people call it when your memory has been modified," Daphne explained, for once without the sarcastic note.

"This is most disturbing," Blaise said slowly. "If what you say is true, then our Headmaster has Obliviated you of your past, of how you learned those strange spells."

Harry felt the trust he had built up for the Headmaster suddenly crumble. It all made sense now! "How do I get this thing off me?"

No one knew. "I can go research it in the library for you," Hermione offered.

Harry smiled at her, knowing she was trying to make an effort to be Harry's friend after he saved her life. "I'll go research with you," Harry volunteered. "I want to be rid of this thing as soon as possible."

"I'm coming too!" Theo said happily. "It'll be like a study session!"

"I'd better come too," Daphne grumped, "just to keep Theo from pissing off the librarian."

"I am always interested in learning more," Blaise admitted. "I shall come as well, if none of you mind."

"Sure," Theo answered.

"Be my guest," Daphne said with a mild sarcastic note.

"We'd be glad to have you," Harry said.

“Great!” Hermione said, gaining confidence as the Slytherins one by one acknowledged her idea as a good one.

“You know, just to finalize things,” Harry began, “I’d be damn proud to have you all as my friends. You three joined me despite the good chance that you’d be hurt, and Hermione, the Gryffindors don’t know what they’re missing. To top it off, you all are helping me with a problem you don’t have to. So, friends?”

“Friends!” everyone chorused.

During every spare moment over the following week, the five of them were in the library, researching. Hermione was, by far, the best at it, seeming to memorize the books as she quickly read through them all. Upon Harry’s and Theo’s insistence, Hermione did not tell the librarian exactly what they were looking for. None of them wanted word of the discovered Memory Charm to reach the ears of Dumbledore.

At the same time, the group had gotten to know each other a bit better. Theodore, Harry discovered, was essentially a goofball with the cunning to keep him out of trouble. Daphne was very sarcastic, but her actions hinted that the sarcasm was designed to hide her desire to keep her friends safe. Daphne and Theodore had known each other since they were very young, and were the best of friends.

Blaise was a bit of an enigma. He was very formal most of the time, and rarely showed emotion, which made him a bit of an oddball even amongst Slytherins. He had a rather large vocabulary too, which made him intimidating as well when he chose to speak, which was rare outside of the group. Nevertheless, his cunning represented itself in his actions. Blaise tended to silently observe the events around him and then store what information he gathered for later use. Hermione was one of the few people he spoke with frequently.

Hermione was very, very intelligent and cunning, so much so that Harry was surprised she was a Gryffindor. She read quite a lot simply because she loved to read and learn. She was slightly uncomfortable about sharing her own feelings, and Harry gathered that came from the fact that she had been teased about being a book-worm for several years now. Hermione was gifted with the capability of drawing

Blaise out of his shell to join a philosophical or ethical discussion, or even just play a bit of chess, which was where her cunning revealed itself in the ability to think very far ahead.

Quetzalcoatl had not yet made himself known, despite Harry's knowledge of the Memory Charm. He was busy weakening the Memory Charm for Harry to eliminate the block. Harry could not rid himself of the block at the power Dumbledore put it at, but hopefully Quetzalcoatl's efforts would make the difference.

Harry had another problem, Quetzalcoatl realized. Harry had to focus especially hard on working the magic he learned from Hogwarts. His magical core was too used to multiplying the spells he acquired from the monsters he defeated and using his Metamorphmagus transformations. Harry had to force his magic to cooperate, which decreased the power of his spells. It would take him a few years for the magic to be flexible enough to cast either Terran or Earth magic easily.

In a sense, magic was like a muscle. The more you used it, the stronger it became, but if it was used only a certain way for too long, it would resist change. Of course, Harry didn't know that everyone else had an easier time casting their spells. But when it became easier, Harry would be immensely powerful.

In the meantime, however, Quetzalcoatl was pleased to see that Harry was staying in good shape, exercising for Quidditch. Flint kept pushing Harry to the end of his limits, which was good for the boy. The fact that the Quidditch match was the first Saturday of the month helped as well.

Finally, the day of the match came. Harry was nervous, but not overly so. He only hoped that the Gryffindors wouldn't try to sabotage him before the match. Flint forced everyone to eat well, and didn't force them all to practice; after all, he wanted them to be at tip-top strength for the match.

"Kick some Gryffindor butt!" Theodore encouraged Harry that morning. "No offense to you, Hermione."

“None taken,” Hermione answered. She was sitting at the Slytherin table, and had been for the last week, despite much anger by both the Slytherins and the Gryffindors. The Gryffindors thought she was betraying them, while the Slytherins didn’t want a mudblood fouling their table.

She had been allowed to view the Quidditch practices, though, with a solemn oath that she wouldn’t divulge any information from it. Flint didn’t like her personally due to her heritage, but saw that Harry seemed more relaxed with his friends around, so he granted Harry’s request to let Hermione watch.

There had been a few attempts from Slytherins to harm her, but a quick demonstration of Hermione’s awesome brains – namely, pulling off several Full Body-Binds in rapid succession, followed by a serious threat of castration from Daphne or infertility from Blaise – dissuaded them from pursuing that objective.

“I didn’t know there was a spell to cause permanent infertility,” Harry had quietly confided to Blaise later.

“There isn’t,” Blaise had replied with a rare mischievous smile. “But they don’t know that.” Harry and Blaise shared a quiet chuckle at that.

Harry was considering including Blaise on his pranks, especially since he didn’t have much time to pull them between Quidditch practice, classwork, homework, and finding that damned Memory Charm Counter. Blaise was the perfect bluffer, with his permanent poker face. *Perhaps after the match...* Harry thought to himself.

Harry forcefully brought his thoughts to the present as he dressed for the game in the standard green and silver Quidditch robes. “Win, or else,” Flint said coldly.

Harry followed the others out onto the field. Madam Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the middle of the field waiting for the two teams, her broom in hand. “Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you,” she said, once they were all gathered around her. Harry noted without surprise that she seemed to be speaking especially to his captain, Flint. Flint and the Gryffindor captain, a fifth year named Oliver Wood, tried to break each other’s hands in a handshake.

“Mount your brooms, please!” Madam Hooch commanded. Harry got on his Nimbus 2000, waiting for the signal. Then, Hooch sounded her silver whistle, and everyone kicked off, hard, ready to play. The Keepers quickly flew off to defend the goals, while the Chasers prepared for the Quaffle. Hooch tossed it up and...

“The Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor!” Lee Jordan, the commentator, cried. “And what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive too...”

“ JORDAN!” McGonagall yelled, and Harry hid a snigger. He had to admit, if he was three years older, and not a Slytherin, he’d probably ask Angelina out.

“Sorry, Professor.” Lee didn’t sound at all sorry.

Harry looked around carefully for the Snitch. The sooner he ended this, the better. The Slytherin Keeper, a guy named Bletchley, wasn’t as good as Harry would have hoped. The Gryffindor Seeker was visibly nervous and was glancing around wildly. Harry flew closer, wanting some serious competition. It was no fun to beat someone who couldn’t play well. “Hey there,” he said in a friendly fashion. “Looking a bit nervous. What’s your name?”

“B-b-brian,” the poor guy said.

Harry shook his head. “You don’t need to be worried about me. Listen, I’m pretty new at this, but I’m pretty sure that the excess nerves aren’t good for the game. You won’t have as much fun! Take a few deep breaths, and relax.”

Brian did as Harry suggested, and Harry was pleased to see the twitching stop. “Why are you helping me?” Brian asked. “You’re a Slytherin!”

“Despite what the others do, eventually it comes down to you and me,” Harry said flatly. “And I want some competition!” Gryffindor scored underneath them, and Flint yelled at Bletchley. Harry ignored the commentating.

"But you're Harry Potter!" Brian protested. "The youngest Seeker in over a century! What can I do against you?"

"Like I said, I'm still new at this." Harry shook his head. "Besides, that attitude won't help at all. What you need is to learn how to have fun while flying. Here, follow me! Keep close!"

Harry shot off to his right, not quite at full speed, and Brian followed as quickly as he dared. "Come on, you can do it!" Harry encouraged, suddenly diving at a steep angle, the wind blowing through his long hair.

"Has Potter seen the Snitch?" Lee asked, and all eyes turned to him.

Brian took a deep breath and followed. Harry pulled out pretty far from the ground, and Brian followed suit, a smile gracing his face as he followed Harry through a few sharper turns and steep climbs and dives. Brian even pulled closer until Harry and he were racing neck and neck. They paused when they were several feet above the Chasers. "See?" Harry asked with a grin.

"Yeah!" Brian agreed. "That was fun!"

"Do your best!" Harry encouraged. "I won't hold back!"

"Neither will I!"

"Although Slytherin Seeker Potter looked as though he had seen the Snitch, the Gryffindor Seeker Jones matches him move for move and reveals that it was a bluff!" Lee said, sounding both surprised and pleased.

Suddenly, Harry's Nimbus 2000 bucked, and Harry almost flew off. "What the hell?" he said aloud as the Nimbus swerved and bucked, trying to shake off its rider. "OK, I'm sure this isn't right!" he yelled as he struggled to stay put. *Come on, Potter, think! Do I have a spell for this kind of thing? There's Dispel, but that would also get rid of the Flying Charm, Cushioning Charm and everything, so it's not a good idea to use that. What about Esuna? Nah, that's supposed to be used on bodies to get rid of poison and such. Damn it! Who's doing this?!*

Harry did his best to look around, knowing that a curse like this required constant eye contact. Harry couldn't tell who was doing this, as his broom was jerking him around too fast for him to see well. Suddenly the broom gave another violent lurch and Harry was hanging by his right hand. Harry's eyes flashed as he thought of another way to do this. *If I can't target the person responsible, then I'll target everyone! Good thing I've got this spell...* "Quake!"

A very thin brown beam of light, too small for anyone to notice, shot from Harry's left hand and struck the ground. The Quidditch field began to shudder, and then shake outright. No one still on the ground, and by proxy in the stands, could maintain their balance, and they all fell over. The curse on Harry's broom lifted, and Harry swung himself back onto his broom before flying off to look for the Snitch.

After another minute, Harry saw it by the Gryffindor edge of the field, flying near the goalposts. He shot off to capture the target, pushing his broom to the limits. "Potter has seen the Snitch, with Jones in hot pursuit!" Lee announced.

Unfortunately for Brian Jones, Harry's broom was faster, and Harry was simply more talented at pulling out a broom's full power. Harry managed to grab the Snitch, showing it to the audience. Lee seemed a little disappointed as he said, "Slytherin wins, 180 to 40."

That night, during dinner, Harry told his friends of the cursed broom experience. They all nodded, having been watching him the whole time, but unable to do anything. "So you caused that earthquake?" Hermione asked.

Harry nodded. "Another one of *those* spells. Pretty effective, eh?"

"Indeed," Blaise agreed.

"Only an adult could cast a curse on a powerful broom like the Nimbus 2000," Daphne said flatly. "It's powerful Dark Arts."

"That leaves two options," Harry realized.

"Two?" Theo asked, confused.

"Yeah. There's Quirrell, and Snape," Harry stated. "Quirrell's the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, so naturally he has to know what he's fighting. And my scar hurts around him, too, which isn't a good sign."

"And then there's Snape," Daphne continued. "From what I hear, he knew more curses when he first started than some of the seventh years."

"And he's wanted the Defense position for years," Theo added, realizing. "So he must know his stuff pretty well."

"I think we can rule Snape out," Harry said slowly. "He owes me a life debt for saving his life from the troll. His magic stops him from killing me until after he's paid me back."

"Quirrell?" Hermione asked incredulously. "But he seems almost harmless! He stutters too much to be a real threat!"

Harry gave Hermione a dark look. "You seem to forget that a good Slytherin can be a very good faker. How did he get this job if he's so harmless? Why does my scar hurt around him? By hiding his true capabilities, he allows us to underestimate him. Don't fall into that trap."

"No one'll believe us, though," Theo pointed out. "We're just first years, and Slytherins at that, except for you, Hermione."

Harry rubbed his temples with a sigh. "The problems keep building up. We just have to do what we can."

"And that is?" Daphne asked sarcastically.

"Dumbledore's Memory Charm is actually good for something apparently. I remember Hagrid emptying out a vault in Gringotts on my birthday, and that same vault was evidently broken into later that same day. We're going to pay a visit to Hagrid tomorrow. It's time to find out what that package from Vault 713 is."

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Heh heh, Harry's figured it out. He doesn't have all his memories back, but he will soon enough, I promise. Hope I made the Obliviate scene believable. And isn't he a true Slytherin, taking the information his enemy unwittingly divulged and combining it with what he shouldn't know? Heh heh. Read and review!

Oh, one more thing. Next posting, regardless of number of reviews, will be on Tuesday next week. Stay tuned!

Sorry if anyone thought this was an update! Just got a couple of reviews that I thought I may as well respond to, since they've got good questions but were anonymous.

Firstly, the matter of Harry Metamorphing Seth and the gunblade into his skin. Seth, in that form, is not exactly dormant, but instead feeds off of Harry's magic. Having no mass, per say, to take care of when Harry's "absorbed" him, he only needs the magic to be fully sustained. Additionally, Seth never really sleeps when absorbed, but he's not at full awareness either when Harry sleeps. Think of it as that half-sleep you know when you just wake up and aren't quite thinking straight. You'll wake up in an instant if you realize "OH SHIT I'M LATE FOR CLASS" right? Seth will wake up fully if Harry's in danger, and then wake Harry up. The gunblade, not being sentient, is basically just being stored in Harry's skin.

Secondly, about the act of Obliviation itself. Harry was Stunned by Snape. Now, in my fiction (I'm not quite sure it's canon) the Stunner doesn't just put you to sleep, it knocks you deeply unconscious. Harry's mind was out of commission while he was Stunned, so he couldn't lend any more power to his shields than he already had. Quetzalcoatl did what he could. As for Dumbledore not reading through Harry's memories after breaking through his shields, the fact of the matter is Dumbledore is still human, and thusly prone to anger. He got angry enough to not care about Harry's past as long as Harry was now under Dumbledore's control.

Thirdly, the discrepancy in Dumbledore's explanation about Harry's fitness. This is actually partially true. Recall how in the Department of Mysteries battle in *The Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore is quite fit and agile and strong even against Voldemort's younger body. He's freaking old, people, of COURSE his magic's boosting his ability! Harry, trusting Dumbledore thanks to a bit of mental manipulation on Dumbledore's part, believes him and thinks nothing more of it.

On a different note, I'd like to thanks Nejdragon for posting if indeed he doesn't normally post except for exceptional stories. As for nantukoprime's review, Odin won't be making things much easier for Harry. Reason being, he's still on Terra, while Harry's on Earth. And I do try not to make things terribly cheap. I mean, Odin appearing out

of nowhere to slay Harry's enemies? Not gonna happen. Besides, Odin never appears for a boss fight in the game, and Quirrel was the "boss" of the first year. Odin might help Harry out randomly on Terra, though.

In response to one-village-idiot, Harry won't be getting his memory back in the middle of dinner... nah, it'll happen over Christmas break. Still though, it'll be next chapter. You'll see.

Thank you all for reading, hoped that cleared things up. Stay tuned for Tuesday!

Chapter 7: Consequences of Desire & Manipulation

Harry pounded on the door. “Hagrid, it’s Harry!”

The half-giant opened the door. “‘Arry? I thought yeh had forgotten bout me! Come in, come in!” Harry led his friends inside. “So, who’re yer friends?”

“This is Hermione Granger, a Gryffindor,” Harry said, pointing out the bushy-haired girl who smiled. “This is Daphne Greengrass, Theodore Nott – we always call him Theo for short – and Blaise Zabini, who’re with me in Slytherin.”

Hagrid seemed a bit wary, but nonetheless offered them some rock cakes and tea, which everyone accepted. The weather was getting colder by the day, and the hot tea that Hagrid served hit the spot nicely. Everyone chatted with Hagrid, and soon he was much more relaxed with the Slytherins.

Then Hermione mentioned a story that she’d heard a while back from two of her fellow Gryffindors. “Hey Hagrid, did you know there’s a three-headed dog in the forbidden room in the third floor corridor?”

Hagrid dropped his mug. “How do you know bout Fluffy? He’s mine!”

Theo blinked. “You named a *three-headed dog* Fluffy?”

“Well, he’s gotta have a name, don’t he? Bought him off a Greek chappie a few years back, and I’ve lent him to Dumbledore to guard the...” Hagrid caught himself and shut his mouth.

“Hagrid, this wouldn’t happen to have something to do with the package from Vault 713, would it?” Harry asked slowly.

“Don’t ask no more, it’s between Dumbledore and Nicolas Flamel,” Hagrid pleaded, not realizing he just gave more information.

“Alright,” Harry said before anyone else could speak. They chatted a bit more with Hagrid before heading up to Hogwarts. “So, Hermione, what’s the deal with the three-headed dog thing?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Apparently Ron Weasley and Dean Thomas were stupid enough to try to get into the forbidden room on the third floor corridor," Hermione said gravely. "Once they got in using *Alohomora*, they saw a great, big three-headed dog."

"Alright," Theo said, and turned to Harry. "But why did you stop us from asking more questions?"

"Didn't you hear him, dumb-ass?" Daphne asked. "Hagrid mentioned that it was between Dumbledore and Nicolas Flamel!"

"We can cross-reference the names and find out what they did together," Hermione informed Theo.

"I've read that name before, I could swear it!" Harry groaned. "But where?"

"Does anyone know how old Dumbledore is? It might help in narrowing the search," Hermione said.

Daphne frowned pensively. "I think it was something along the lines of 162 years old, but I don't know for certain."

"Let us not forget that we still need to find the counter to Harry's Memory Charm," Blaise reminded his friends. "That may help in the search for Nicolas Flamel as well."

"How about we alternate?" Harry suggested. "Look for my solution one day, and look for Flamel the next?"

"Sounds like a plan," Hermione agreed.

The researching had born no fruit by mid-November, and Harry was getting desperate to be rid of his Memory Charm. His feeling that there was something that needed to be done was slowly growing, but he needed to know what had to be done before he could do it! It wasn't all-consuming yet, but it was present, and Harry somehow knew that the sooner it was done, the better.

December came and still nothing had come up, despite the stubborn work of the four Slytherins plus Hermione. Ron still led the Gryffindors

– minus a few people – against Hermione and the Slytherins, spreading horrible rumors that almost had Hermione in tears when she heard a few of them. Harry's group then began to prank the hell out of Ron in retaliation. Everyone contributed their ideas, and worked together to thoroughly embarrass or horrify Ron. In the latest one, Ron had been tie-dyed and stuck to a wall with spiders crawling over him. The previous one involved a time-released Shrinking Charm on his underwear.

The Weasley twins told Harry once that Ron got down on his knees and begged them to prank Harry and a few other Slytherins. Fred and George had told him, quite simply, that they wouldn't, and that Ron had dug himself into this mess.

Draco's side of the Slytherins still hated Harry and his friends, but they couldn't do anything about it; if something happened to Harry, the rest of the Quidditch team would kill the perpetrator. If something happened to Harry's friends, Harry proved to be quite loyal and avenged them, as shown by one day in November.

Harry and his friends were studying in the library when all of a sudden, the hair on Harry's neck stood up. Not one second later, he heard a cry of "*Diffindo!*"

"Get down!" Harry yelled, ducking and pulling Daphne and Blaise, who were next to him, down with him.

Unfortunately, Hermione wasn't fast enough and got hit in the arm. The spell wasn't very powerful, thankfully, and it wasn't too deep. Nevertheless, Hermione whimpered at the sudden pain.

Harry looked for the origin of the spell and located Draco Malfoy. "Get her to the hospital wing," he growled at Daphne, Theo and Blaise. "I'll take care of this bastard."

"Right!" Theo said. "Come on, Hermione." Daphne tore off a strip of her robe and wrapped it around the wound, hurrying a crying Hermione out of the library.

Harry started walking towards a smirking Malfoy. "So, think you're a big man, sending a spell at unsuspecting innocents?" Harry snarled,

drawing his wand. Malfoy seemed to realize just how badly he screwed up just then, and turned to run.

“Oh no you don’t!” Harry said coldly, running and catching Malfoy by the robes.

“Let me go, damn it!” Malfoy demanded. “I only gave that mudblood what was coming to her!”

“Silence your tongue before I rip it out of you.” Malfoy shut up. “Draco, here’s the way it’s going to work,” Harry said dangerously, his eyes boring into the blond’s. “I’ve had enough of the threats and attempts against Hermione. If Hermione gets hurt by a Slytherin, you get hurt worse. Everything that happens to her shall be done unto you, except it shall be more painful. Got it? *Diffindo*.” Malfoy hissed in pain as the skin on his arm split open, but said nothing as Harry walked out of the library.

Harry was unsurprised to find that no one threatened Hermione anymore after that event. The name of Malfoy still held great power, evidently, and Draco certainly did not want Harry after his blood.

Finally, it was time for the winter break. Hermione, Blaise, Theo and Daphne were all heading home to visit their families, but each promised to help the instant they got back. And the purebloods privately told Harry that they would see what they could do about finding information about Nicolas Flamel or Memory Charms from their parents.

There were very few staying at Hogwarts for Christmas, but Harry was one of them. Harry didn’t blame the others for leaving; after all, family was one of the most important things a person had. *Not that the Dursleys count as family*, Harry thought to himself bitterly. He shook his head, trying to rid himself of such thoughts. Harry spent his time studying his books, coming out only for food.

On Christmas, Harry came out and was surprised to see several gifts. He opened the first one, apparently from Hermione, and found a broom servicing kit and a note telling Harry to keep his Nimbus in tip-top shape. Harry smiled. *Practical as always, Hermione*. From Theo, Harry received a box of Chocolate Frogs, and Daphne had given

Harry some of Honeyduke's finest chocolate. Blaise's present was a new wizard's chess set. Then, he noticed that under the tree there was still one more present for him. "Hmm? Who could this be from?"

He quickly opened the gift and pulled out... some sort of cloak. It was almost silvery, and shimmered in the light. Harry had to admit that it looked pretty cool, so he put it on and looked in a mirror to see how he looked.

Harry's jaw dropped at the sight he saw... or didn't see. Everything from his neck down was invisible! *Ooh, whoever you are, you've just made a friend!* Harry thought appreciatively. Then he read the note, written in a loopy handwriting.

Harry,

Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well. A Very Merry Christmas to you.

"Wonder who sent this to me," Harry muttered. "Maybe a friend of my dad's? But why not actually contact me before this, or at least give me his or her name?" It just didn't seem to make sense. After a few moments' pondering, he left that mystery for future solving. As it was, Harry now had an incredible aid to sneaking around undetected. He decided to test it out that night, but in the meantime, Harry studied his own books for the moment, looking over a few of the ones that he hadn't gotten to yet. At the same time, he ate the occasional Chocolate Frog, looking at the cards and putting them in his Item Bag.

It was around noon when Harry came across a Dumbledore card. Harry groaned. "Great, this was the first one I'd ever gotten!" He was about to put it up when the back caught his eye. He whipped it back up to look more closely at the back, and then his face split into an ecstatic grin. "Heh! I found you, you little bastard! I knew I'd read your name before, *Nicolas Flamel!*"

Dropping his books into his Item Bag, and stuffing his Invisibility Cloak in it as well, Harry set up to the library at a brisk pace. When he got there, Madame Pince was there, reading. Now that Harry knew what he was looking for, he quickly located the section generally

devoted to unusual magics. He located a thick tome simply labeled *A History of Alchemy*, and sat down with it.

Harry looked at the table of contents and located the section titled “Famous Alchemists and Their Greatest Achievements.” Flipping to that section, Harry quickly found the name he was looking for.

The ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Sorcerer’s Stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal.

There have been many reports of the Sorcerer’s Stone over the centuries, but the only Stone currently in existence belongs to Mr. Nicolas Flamel, the noted alchemist and opera lover. Mr. Flamel, who celebrated his six hundred and sixty-fifth birthday last year, enjoys a quiet life in Devon with his wife, Perenelle (six hundred and fifty-eight).

Harry let out a low whistle. *Immortal and all the gold you could want? Anyone remotely interested in material possessions would want it!* His blood suddenly chilled. *The potential for misuse is enormous!* He could scarcely dare to imagine the consequences if an evil wizard got his hands on one. *Should it even exist?*

Harry decided to save that discussion for when his friends returned. He now knew that Fluffy, the three-headed dog, was almost undoubtedly guarding the Sorcerer’s Stone. Dumbledore was guarding Flamel’s Stone, but why? What had changed between this year and the last? Why were Flamel’s protections inadequate now? Much to Harry’s frustration, he had no idea, though he suspected that Dumbledore wanted the Elixir of Life for his own use.

Well, I never claimed to know everything, Harry thought to himself amusedly. *Hopefully the others can help fill me in. At least now I know what’s being guarded.* On the other hand, Harry had to admit, it only helped him know a possible motive.

I’ve got a suspect and a motive, but I can’t prove anything yet. I’ve evidence, but nothing conclusive about the cursed broom incident, Harry summarized to himself. *Best to focus on what I can do, instead of what I can’t.*

Harry decided to continue his research, looking for any references to Memory Charms. When Madame Pince kicked him out after dinner, Harry knew he had one new option that may provide the knowledge he needed. The Invisibility Cloak could get him into the Restricted Section, and there, Harry could research all night if he had to. *Let's do this.*

Several minutes later, Harry was under his Invisibility Cloak and sneaking into the library. Squashing down his nervousness, Harry cautiously entered the Restricted Section, waiting for alarms. When none came, Harry proceeded to browse through the books, looking for a promising title. In his searching, he accidentally knocked one of the books out of the shelves. The book fell to the floor, opening to a random page, and a loud scream emitted from it.

And there's the alarm, Harry thought grimly, moving quickly away from the area. He accidentally came across Filch, the bitter caretaker, with his cat, Mrs. Norris, meeting with none other than Severus Snape. "You asked me to come directly to you, Professor, if anyone was wandering around at night, and somebody's been in the library – Restricted Section."

"The Restricted Section? Well, they can't be far, we'll catch them."

They came closer and closer, and Harry backed away quietly. Then he came across a door he hadn't seen before. Curious, he glanced around to make sure no one was nearby, and entered. The room inside was almost completely bare, with only a mirror in the center of the room with some boxes to the sides.

The mirror, at a second glance, was magnificent. It had a gold frame, and was as tall as the ceiling. There was an inscription on the frame: *Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.*

Harry didn't get it. It certainly wasn't in Latin, nor was it a Germanic language judging from its dissimilarities to English. Then it clicked. *It's a mirror, right? So the inscription is backwards!* "I show not your face but your heart's desire," Harry said slowly. "So, it's a magical mirror."

Curious as to what he would see, Harry stepped forward, taking off the Invisibility Cloak. He saw himself, and several people who looked

very familiar, along with Hermione, Daphne, Theo and Blaise, looking back at him, smiling. Everyone was around Harry, showing their support and friendship. The strangely familiar men and women took off their weapons and tossed them aside.

Harry lowered his head, closing his eyes with a soft smile. He knew what the mirror was showing him. His greatest desire, the one Harry wanted with all his heart, was to be with all his friends and to simply enjoy the time they had together, without worrying about the future, without needing to hold himself back for their own protection.

Quetzalcoatl had been weakening the mental block for some time now, and it was now very weak, easily shattered. The people in the Mirror of Erised triggered the recollection, and Dumbledore's Memory Charm was now countered.

Memories flooded in, taking their rightful place in Harry's mind, and shoving the false memories away. Harry finally felt complete and whole once more as his eyes blazed. Harry straightened up, not recalling having fallen to his knees as the memories returned. With a few moments concentration, Harry restored his Occlumency shields and reinforced them far beyond where he had held them before.

Quetzalcoatl, you there?

:Yes.:

Dang, it's good to hear your voice again! I take it you weakened the Memory Charm enough for it to be ineffective?

:Exactly.:

Have you been paying attention to the current events?

:Yes. I believe you are correct that Dumbledore is hiding the Sorcerer's Stone in the forbidden corridor, and that Quirrell is the prospective thief.:

Any thoughts on why he would Obliviate my past?

:There are several possibilities, but the one that seems most probable is quite simple – Dumbledore desires your subservience. By posing as your rescuer from the Dursleys, he wanted to ensure your loyalty. For what purpose is unknown.:

I see. What of Professor Snape? Snape had been much better to Harry ever since he had saved the Potions Master's life, and actually helped every now and then with a pointer or two.

:I have no idea: Quetzalcoatl confessed. :You will have to ask him why he treated you the way he did yourself.:

Harry looked back at the mirror once before throwing on the Invisibility Cloak and making his way back to the Slytherin common room. There were no delays. *Any other news?* Harry asked along the way.

:Got some bad news, I'm afraid.: Quetzalcoatl explained the difficulty with Harry's magic in detail. :So you will have a hard time casting some of the higher level spells until your magic becomes more flexible.:

Understood. At least I have my memories and Terran spells.

:Actually, I would recommend not using the Terran spells whenever you have an Earth spell that can do the job. Each time you cast a Terran spell, your magical core has to replace it by multiplying one of your existing ones. When your core focuses on that, it can't adapt as quickly to the Earth spells. By repeatedly doing this, you delay the time when you can cast each fine. It's bad enough that your core still has to work on multiplying your Ultimate level spells.:

Harry scowled under his cloak. *Fine, but I don't have to like it.* He reached the common room, said the password, and went to his dorm, putting his Cloak in his Item Bag. Then he went to bed.

The next day, Harry sent off letters to his friends, thanking them for the gifts, and vaguely hinting that he had his memories and knew who Nicolas Flamel was. *Now, I have to find a secure place to put a permanent portal. But where?* After several minutes' thought, he sighed and admitted to himself that there was no place he knew that

was safe for the portal. *It's just going to have to wait*, Harry thought resignedly.

Harry sat down, and found that his thoughts turned to his friends – Zell, Quistis, Squall, Instructor Shugui, and Instructor Tsuru. *Zell, Quistis and Squall are in their fourth year now*, Harry realized. *You know what?*

:What?:

I'm going to go visit Terra for a day! Harry decided.

:But what about Headmaster Cid's warning?: Quetzalcoatl asked.

Surely Voldemort won't discover a way to follow me if I'm there for a single day, Harry reassured his tenant. *Besides, I miss my friends, and I didn't get a chance to tell them goodbye.*

:If you're going to do this, then you should make sure no one sees you: Quetzalcoatl warned.

Right. I'm going to an empty classroom under my Invisibility Cloak, and then I'll take a portal to Terra.

Fifteen minutes later, Harry performed the portal ceremony and jumped in. After several minutes in transit, Harry emerged in the forest outside of Balamb Garden. He Metamorphed into his SeeD form and allowed his gunblade to reemerge from its tattoo state, just in case someone wanted a fight.

He should have known better; all the monsters here were far too afraid of him, and had been for the last couple of years. Harry made good time getting back to Balamb Garden. It was the day after Christmas, so Harry had a hunch that his friends would be in a snowball fight.

He was mostly right. Zell was out there with Quistis, teaming up against a bunch of younger people, but Squall was sitting on a bench, apparently studying. Harry shook his head. "He's always so serious," Harry commented to Seth, who was loosely wrapped around his neck for extra warmth in the cold weather. "He needs a girlfriend."

“Not that you would know,” Seth teased. “You haven’t had a single one!”

“My body’s freaking eleven!” Harry protested. “Not my fault I’m not interested!”

“You keep telling yourself that.”

Harry decided to ignore that comment. “Zell! Quistis! Squall!”

All three heads whipped so hard to look at him that Harry thought they’d get backlash. “Harry!” they cried at once, abandoning what they were doing and rushing over. They all began to talk at once, and Harry couldn’t understand a word they were saying until Zell yelled loudly.

“SHUT UP!” Quistis and Squall closed their mouths. Zell looked unusually serious. “Now, the serious questions. Where have you been? When your letters stopped coming, we thought the worst.”

“Earth, my home dimension. I’m going to a school of magic,” Harry answered.

“How’d you get to Earth? I assume it’s the same way you got back,” Zell continued, still looking serious.

Harry was beginning to get worried. Had Zell changed so much in the few months he’d been gone? “I met Odin, and he gave me the knowledge of how to create portals.”

Zell nodded sagely, and both Quistis and Squall were looking at him, surprise on their faces. Since when did Zell act all serious, like, like Squall? “Why didn’t you visit earlier?”

“My Headmaster cast a spell on me that blocked off my memory,” Harry explained. “I couldn’t remember anything about Terra. Heck, I didn’t even know I’d been on Terra!”

“Last question,” Zell announced. “Do you have a girlfriend yet?” he asked, his solemn mask breaking down into a gleeful smirk.

“ZELLLLLL!” Quistis and Harry groaned together.

“What? I’m serious!”

Harry sighed, preparing for the inevitable ribbing. *But*, Harry thought, *I wouldn’t trade this time with my friends for the world.* “No, I don’t.”

Almost immediately he was the object of much ribbing and good-natured ridicule. When Harry pointed out that neither Zell nor Squall had girlfriends either, Zell merely laughed. “I will soon enough!”

“Eh, I’m not interested in acquiring a girlfriend,” Squall said matter-of-factly, taking a sip of his hot chocolate.

Zell couldn’t pass up this opportunity. “What about a boyfriend?”

Squall choked on the hot chocolate, sputtering. “I am not gay!” he protested. “I am straight, thank you very much!”

Harry began laughing. *Some things never change.* “What about you, Quistis? Found any potential boyfriend material?” he asked.

Quistis blushed lightly, but shook her head. “Only eye candy. It’s hard to create a relationship when you never know when you’ll be able to see each other.”

“Alas, the life of SeeD,” Harry agreed. “So, fill me in. How’ve you guys been?”

After almost five hours of just relaxing and having fun – even Squall joined the snowball fight before they went in for hot chocolate – Harry told them it was time for him to go see his unofficial sister, and then he’d go back to Earth.

Harry spent a few hours with Tracie in Dollet, just chatting and catching up. Harry told her about his travels, and how he would be gone for quite some time again after he left. Tracie now had a steady boyfriend, Harry discovered, and she thought that they had something special. “I really, *really* like him,” Tracie admitted. “He’s a great guy, and a hopeless romantic.”

Harry smiled and congratulated her before moving on to other subjects. Eventually, he had to go, so he gave her a hug. "Gotta go," Harry told her. "Stay safe."

"Right. You too."

Harry laughed. "Me? Safe? Never!" They both laughed at that. "Good luck with the boyfriend thing."

"Go get a girlfriend," Tracie teased.

"Why is everyone teasing me about that today?" Harry moaned. "I better go before someone else pops up." He smiled and left, finding a secluded spot to travel back home via portal.

Harry reemerged in his room, and the purplish wormhole closed. Harry decided to get some sleep; he'd had a very fun day over on Terra, but creating portals was very taxing on Harry's energy.

The rest of Christmas break, Harry was bored. Flat out, completely, utterly, seriously, death-defyingly bored. He was tired of reading all day, and he didn't dare make another portal to Terra. He had no idea if Dumbledore had a way of detecting his presence in the castle, which was a consideration he'd completely forgotten to think about before jumping into the nearest wormhole to Terra.

Harry wanted something that would occupy his mind, something that would make good use of his time. As Harry had no friends currently present in the castle, he turned to one of the few things he could do: training.

But before he could do that, he needed a place to work in. There were plenty of abandoned classrooms, especially in the dungeons. In fact, only the Potions classes were done in the dungeons, and that only took up three rooms – one for the class itself, one for the student stores, and one for Professor Snape's private office.

So, two days after his visit to Terra, Harry pulled on his Invisibility Cloak and viewed the different classrooms. Finally choosing one to be his training ground, Harry glanced around before entering the classroom. There were desks cluttered at one side of the room, a

blackboard on the wall, and a thick layer of dust that covered everything.

Harry scowled. “*Scourgify*,” he muttered, focusing hard on the effect he wanted as he waved his wand. The dirt and dust disappeared, leaving the place clean. Harry wanted to transfigure the desks into targets, but he was not skilled enough for that. The Transfiguration classes were very difficult as it was, despite Harry’s supposed ease.

The reason Harry had been so good at it was, quite simply, he had learned the year’s work before school started. He had had almost a month, and Harry had had nothing better to do, and his Occlumency had sped up the learning process a great deal. Nevertheless, Harry was not a god; he could not do the second year level Transfiguration yet. So Harry decided to see how he stood with McGonagall. She would teach him, right?

“Hello, Professor,” Harry greeted warmly.

“Mr. Potter,” McGonagall replied, nodding at him. “How can I help you?”

“Well, you see,” Harry began, trying to sound like a first year, “I was wondering if you could teach me more Transfiguration? Maybe how to be an Animagus like you said dad could have been?” Being able to transform into an animal upon command would be a great asset, but Harry didn’t know how it was done. McGonagall was his chance to find out.

Sadly, her answer was in the negative. “I’m sorry, Mr. Potter –” and she did look sorry – “but it would be grossly unfair to the rest of the first year population if I were to speed up your lessons.”

I should have expected that answer, Harry thought to himself, head bowed in mild dejection. *I really can’t rely on adults to go outside their duties for me... well, except for a few*, he amended, thinking of Headmaster Cid, Instructor Shugui and Instructor Tsuru.

Seeing Harry’s disappointment, McGonagall decided to throw him a bone. “That doesn’t mean, however, that I cannot answer any questions you may have.”

Harry brightened immediately. That meant that he could learn on his own, and if he had trouble, he could ask McGonagall for pointers. "Thank you," Harry said with a genuine smile. McGonagall gave him a small smile in return.

"No, thank you for trusting me enough to come to me despite the fact that I'm the Gryffindor Head of House," McGonagall corrected.

Harry nodded. He decided to act on something he had been sensing around McGonagall. He had been able to sense magic around him to draw for several years, and that sense still worked here on Earth. That included his friends, though he could only sense their magic by focusing specifically on them. However, he had been able to detect every student who came within a few dozen meters of him, and he could "feel" their magical core. McGonagall's magic felt, for lack of a better word, almost feline when she came close. "Would you happen to be a cat Animagus?"

McGonagall froze. "How did you know that?"

I knew it. Interesting, I can detect Animagi. Harry suddenly remembered his previous Scan and almost kicked himself for forgetting. "You have a catlike grace when you're walking, and your eyes, when they focus on a single person, don't blink at all," Harry said, quickly browsing through his memories. "When you're irritated with someone, you give the impression of *stalking* after them, which is why we students get the feeling of impending doom."

McGonagall, still a little unsettled, accepted Harry's explanation at face value. "Yes, I am a house cat Animagus. Animagi tend to take on a few mannerisms of their inner animal."

This is the perfect opportunity to ask about the possibility of me becoming an Animagus! "Professor, how would I go about becoming an Animagus?"

McGonagall hesitated, but relented. "I suppose it couldn't hurt to tell you the process. First, you have to brew the Animagus Revealer Potion, which, I feel obligated to tell you, contains several hard-to-get ingredients. The potion takes approximately two months to brew. Once you drink the potion, you will start having visions when you

sleep where you must search for your animal. If you fail to find it within a week, you must retake the Animagus Revealer Potion before you can keep searching. It is very common for it to take up to a full month to locate one's animal. It took me almost three weeks, myself."

"What happens after you find your animal?" Harry asked excitedly.

"Well, then you practice partial transformations," McGonagall continued. "What I mean is just transforming your fingers into claws and such, slowly moving up to the whole hand, and then part of the arm, and so on. It is a slow, painful process, I assure you. Eventually, you reach the point where you can transform fully, but even then the transformation is slow, and you can only hold the form for a short time. To transform faster and hold it longer simply requires practice."

"How long does it normally take, altogether?" Harry asked slowly, wary of the answer.

"It takes the wizard or witch approximately six months to become an Animagus, after acquiring the ingredients for the potion," McGonagall answered solemnly. "The ingredients themselves are, as I said, hard to get, and very expensive. To be completely honest, the ingredients themselves, along with the skill required to make the potion, keep many of the potential Animagi from unlocking the power."

"Not everyone can be an Animagus?" Harry asked for confirmation.

"There are certain power requirements," McGonagall affirmed. "And few want to go through such a long process only to register themselves at the Ministry of Magic."

"I suppose that takes out all the power behind being an Animagus, if people know what your form is," Harry agreed. "How does the Ministry enforce registration?"

McGonagall blinked. "I, I don't think it does," she realized in horror. "What a gross oversight! It just relies on the new Animagi to register themselves! Although, there is a rather large fine for being an unregistered Animagus," she told Harry.

Harry plastered a smile on his face, while inside he was cursing. *Damn it, I'm going to have to be more careful; I can't detect Animagi from far away!* "Is there a limit to the size of the Animagus? I mean, can you get dragon Animagi, or flea Animagi?"

McGonagall chuckled. "I don't think we've ever seen a flea Animagus, but the rule of thumb is quite simply this: the greater change in size, the more power required. Also, magical creatures take an immense amount of power, more than the ordinary wizard."

"Can you have more than one Animagus form?" Harry asked, curious.

"Yes, but it requires far more power than the average Animagus possesses," McGonagall said slowly. "Not only that, but each new transformation becomes more difficult, according to theory. Merlin himself is known to have had three Animagus forms: a phoenix, a bear and a salamander."

Harry blinked. "Two of his forms are magical creatures of fire," he pointed out.

McGonagall nodded. "It's said that Merlin's favorite element was fire, and specialized in using fire spells."

"What exactly determines what Animagus form one has?"

"That is a subject with several viewpoints," McGonagall told Harry. "Some say that the forms rely on the innate personality, and that is the one I personally agree with. Others say that the forms ultimately come down to the experiences of life, while still others believe that one's core beliefs determine the forms. Magical power, however, does play a part in determining the animals possible."

"You keep saying that magical power is important to the transformation," Harry commented. "How much is necessary?"

McGonagall considered. "I would say, enough power to do fifth or sixth year spells easily. Additionally, the transformation requires a very strong will and some skill in Transfiguration."

"I see... well, thanks for everything, Professor."

“Come by anytime, Mr. Potter.”

Harry spent the last week before school started training himself. He spent some time practicing with his gunblade – he hadn’t practiced in months, and as such his form was deteriorating – and working on his aim. He could aim just fine with his Terran spells; Terran spells depended more upon the direction the mind aimed it in than where Harry’s hand was pointing. But aiming with a wand was different, since the spell went in the direction the wand was pointing.

To practice his aim, Harry went to the room in the dungeons he had claimed for his own and set up a desk to be his target. He used a charm generally used for highlighting notes to see exactly where he hit. Half an hour later, Harry determined that his aim wasn’t bad, but it could use work.

When Harry got tired of practicing his aim, he worked on his spells. Currently, he had read all the way up to fifth year magic, but he could reasonably cast only first and second year Charms. He had made a point of learning the fourth year Summoning Charm simply because it was so useful. He was still at first year Transfiguration, but Harry was not practicing his Potions, for good reason. There were so many different ways that brewing potions could go wrong, and he wanted to make sure he didn’t accidentally do something life-altering.

So, wanting to get a bit ahead of the game – and wanting to become an Animagus sooner rather than later – Harry went to the library and checked out the next book for Transfiguration. By the time school started again, Harry had finished reading the theory and was practicing the first two exercises. He was making slow progress.

Then, school started once again. That night, Harry got the gang together in the library in a quiet place, using his magic sense to make sure they weren’t bothered. He quietly told them that he had countered the Memory Charm finally, but that it was due to a magical object he’d encountered over the break. “So if any of you know the incantation for the counter, that’d be great.”

Daphne nodded. “My uncle used to be an Obliviator for the Ministry. He didn’t think telling me how to counter Memory Charms was something I would use badly. It’s *Commoneo*.”

"*Commoneo*. Got it. Thanks," Harry said gratefully.

"So, just where did you live?" Theo asked eagerly.

Harry bit his lip. He wanted to tell his friends, he truly did, but could he afford the risk? All Dumbledore would have to do would be to look in their eyes and he'd know. "I can't tell you yet," Harry said sadly.

"Why the hell not? We're your friends, right?" Daphne demanded.

Surprisingly, it was Blaise who answered. "Daphne, it is quite obvious that this subject is a matter of grave importance to keep secret. Perhaps Harry is simply wary of those who would look into our minds." He turned to Harry. "I assume you know Occlumency?"

Harry nodded silently, astounded that Blaise had so accurately pinned down Harry's objection. "Wizards and witches can read minds?" Hermione asked, eyes wide.

"Well, it's not mind reading, per say," Theo said slowly. "Legilimency is the art of entering someone's mind and reading their surface thoughts and emotions. Those skilled in the art can read memories as well. Occlumency is opposite art, shielding the mind and organizing it so it'll work better."

"Some of the pureblood families teach their children Occlumency," Daphne told the rest. "Theo and I know rudimentary Occlumency because his father decided to teach us. He doesn't exactly trust the Headmaster, and apparently for good reason."

"You're going to need better than basic Occlumency to stave away Dumbledore's and Snape's probes," Harry said gravely. "Looks like we have our next project: getting you up to speed."

"Did you find out who Nicolas Flamel was?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah. He's an Alchemist, and the only known maker of the Sorcerer's Stone, also known as the Philosopher's Stone." Hermione gasped. "The Sorcerer's Stone can turn any metal into gold, and can produce the Elixir of Life, which will make the user immortal," Harry continued.

Theo whistled. "Now if that ain't incentive, I don't know what is!"

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "He and Dumbledore used to work together in Alchemy. Dumbledore must have convinced Flamel to let him guard it at Hogwarts. Though why he thinks it's a good idea to hide a very powerful object that Voldemort is sure to want in a school is beyond me," Harry added darkly, ignoring the shiver that all present gave at the name.

"That does seem a bit strange," Hermione admitted.

Daphne snapped her fingers after a moment's thought. "Don't you think it's a bit of a coincidence that the year Harry comes to Hogwarts, the Stone is brought here?"

Hermione's eyes widened. "Of course! You mean..."

"Yeah, I do. But how would..."

"He'd have to..."

"He can't possibly be thinking Harry could..."

"Do you see another option?"

"No. That's just cruel!"

"Do you two mind filling us in?" Harry asked, now very confused as the three boys watched the girls like a tennis match.

Daphne and Hermione looked at each other, and Daphne nodded at Hermione to explain. She took a deep breath. "Dumbledore brought the Stone to Hogwarts to *test* you Harry. He used the Stone to lure You-Know-Who to Hogwarts, and he expects you to go down and heroically face him to protect the Stone."

"Dumbledore will probably follow, invisible, and save you at the last minute," Daphne added. "A very clever ploy to build trust for him while at the same time giving you a taste of You-Know-Who's evil."

Harry's jaw dropped. "And you two came up with that just now with half-completed sentence fragments?" They nodded. Harry turned to his fellow males. "They're smart. Crazy smart. Let's not do anything to get on their bad sides."

Theo and Blaise nodded, each slightly intimidated by the girls' show of intelligence. "I suggest we work on teaching myself and Hermione Occlumency," Blaise said, trying to change the subject.

"Right."

Several days later, Hermione and Blaise each had some rudimentary shields. They had learned quickly, naturally having very organized minds. Then, Harry decided he would try his hand at Legilimency. He would test himself against his friends to also give them the benefit of experience guarding their mind, thus killing two birds with one stone.

Harry took out his wand and surreptitiously pointed it at Hermione. "*Legilimens*," Harry whispered, recalling the spell from Odin. He felt some resistance, but could sense Hermione's emotions, mostly consisting of determination, but also trust. Harry didn't know what the trust was for, but he liked to think it was for her friends.

Hermione frowned. "Harry, there's something on my shields."

Harry grinned at her. "That would be me. You need to focus a bit harder, since I can sense your emotions." Hermione nodded determinedly and redoubled her efforts. Harry suddenly couldn't sense her emotions anymore. "Well done. Remember that you need to use your magic to make a shield around your mind. This shield will depend completely on your will. For a while, you'll need to keep focusing on it. Eventually, it will become second nature." He was no longer speaking just to Hermione, but to Daphne, Blaise and Theo as well. "I'll be testing my Legilimency against your Occlumency randomly to give you experience in guarding your mind."

"Ah," Blaise said understandingly. "You wish to improve both our defenses and your attacks."

"Exactly."

Dumbledore frowned. He could no longer read Potter's thoughts in the hallway, and he was having more and more trouble doing the same to his friends. His loyal servant, Snape, could no longer even do that, and it was frustrating him to no end. *They're learning Occlumency. But who's teaching them? And why?* Dumbledore didn't know, as he never had a chance to perform a deep Legilimency scan.

Dumbledore sat down, rubbing his temples. *My Memory Charm couldn't have broken down; I put as much power as I dared, and Potter doesn't have the power to cancel it on his own. Come to think of it, no one but me should have even guessed I put a Memory Charm on him.*

He shook his head. *So Potter couldn't be the culprit. Severus would have told me, so he isn't either. None of the families of Potter's friends have stopped by recently. Madame Pince hasn't alerted me to anyone checking out any of the Occlumency books either. Perhaps they are natural Occlumens?* Dumbledore considered the possibility. *That would suggest that the more they are exposed to Legilimency the stronger their shields become. But the odds that all five of them are natural Occlumens are astronomical. No, there's got to be another explanation.*

"Wait a minute, aren't Nott and Greengrass pureblooded families that have a reputation for resistance against mind magics?" Dumbledore recalled aloud. *That would mean that Nott and Greengrass are teaching them what Occlumency they know and then upgrading their own. It must have hit a chord with Potter, who then restored his own Occlumency shields and upgraded them.*

Nevertheless, Dumbledore knew he had to stop this sudden progress. *I need Potter as my tool, not as my equal. He will learn Occlumency when I tell him to, and not before! I need him to be disposable once he's defeated Tom for the last time!*

He took a pinch of Floo powder and threw it into his fireplace. "Severus Snape!" he commanded.

After several moments, Snape's head appeared in the fireplace. "Yes, Headmaster?"

“Please bring Harry Potter to my office.”

“Yes sir.”

Dumbledore started planning what he needed to say to simultaneously keep Potter from learning Occlumency while not Obliviating him; his friends would surely suspect if Potter suddenly forgot about Occlumency.

Harry’s mind was whirling; why was Snape bringing him to Dumbledore now? He didn’t understand. *Did Dumbledore realize his Memory Charm’s been countered? I won’t let him do it again, even if I have to fight him!* Harry was close to a panic attack; he had no idea how strong Dumbledore was, but it was surely stronger than Harry. Much stronger. Dumbledore’s longevity proclaimed his magical strength, while he was well known to have an incredible knowledge of spells. He could even do wandless silent magic to a certain extent, and Harry knew from his books on theory that such a feat spoke of an astounding strength of will.

Harry, on the other hand, was struggling with silent casting. He could silently cast several spells from Terra, but that involved calling an already existing spell and casting it. It did not require as much focus as simultaneously shaping the spell and casting it, and shaping the spell itself took a focus that Harry was still developing.

Harry had three advantages that Dumbledore did not – youth, physical fitness and Terran magic. Nevertheless, Harry knew he stood no chance against the age-old wizard. All in all, Harry could put up a fight, but Dumbledore’s raw magical power would ultimately win. Harry didn’t need to Scan him to know that.

Harry had thought of all this on the way, and as Snape guided him up the stairs Harry prepared himself for battle, both mental and physical. *Junction my best spells on*, he ordered Quetzalcoatl tersely. Quetzalcoatl was just as tense as Harry, and complied without a word.

Snape may not have been able to read Harry’s mind, but the atmosphere had grown steadily tenser, and he could see out of the corner of his eye that Harry’s stance bore resemblance to a cornered animal – ready to fight or run at the slightest notice. “Relax, Potter,”

Snape said sternly. "You're a Slytherin, act like one!" But one question plagued his mind: *Why is Potter acting like this?*

To Harry's surprise, that was exactly what he needed to hear. He forced his body to relax, though his mind was ready for anything. *If I had stayed that tense, the game would've been up*, Harry realized. They reached the door, and Harry took the opportunity to take a deep breath and school his features before Snape opened the door.

Dumbledore was smiling as always, with that damnable twinkle in his eyes. Now Harry recognized it for what it was; the twinkle was meant to attract attention to his eyes so he could easily skim the surface thoughts and emotions of those in his presence. "Harry my boy, how are you?"

Harry forced a smile. "I'm doing well, Headmaster. Classes are going well as always."

"And your Quidditch practice?"

"Flint's driving us to the ground," Harry lied, keeping up his shields, "but I'm enjoying it."

"Good, good." Dumbledore clasped his hands together, still keeping up that twinkle, trying to draw Harry's eyes into his own to test Harry's shields. "Harry, I understand that you've been learning Occlumency." Harry merely nodded, preparing for the inevitable confrontation. "I'm afraid going beyond the basics of Occlumency is detrimental to a wizard's growth," Dumbledore continued. "It stunts the growth of one's magical core when you're just starting your magical learning, and I'm certain you don't want that."

"Of course not," Harry agreed.

"So, for your own good, you need to lower your Occlumency shields," Dumbledore concluded. "I know this may take some time as you've obviously spent time building them up, but please begin the process immediately with your friends."

"Yes sir," Harry said. "When can I begin it again?"

Dumbledore considered. *When I say so!* “I believe when you begin your fifth year your magical core should be able to accommodate your Occlumency.” *And that will give me enough time to forever endear myself to you so you’ll be comfortable taking down your shields in front of me.*

Harry nodded, keeping his innate anger from showing on his mask of respect. “Right. Thanks, Headmaster, for letting me know.”

“Anytime,” Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling even brighter.

Harry left the office and walked down the stairs to the gargoyle before breathing a sigh of relief. *He doesn’t know about the Memory Charm failure! Thank God!*

:But how will you deal with this?: Quetzalcoatl asked. *:Dumbledore wants you to lower your Occlumency shields, and that of your friends. If you do that, everything you seek to keep hidden shall be revealed!:*

Harry nodded seriously. *That is a problem,* he agreed, walking down the hall. *But I have an idea!*

That night, after dinner, Harry told his friends about the meeting with Dumbledore. Hermione’s eyes widened. “Oh no! He knows about us learning Occlumency?”

Harry shrugged. “It was bound to happen eventually, actually. He is a very proficient Legilimens, and he would definitely notice if he could no longer read us.”

Blaise looked at Harry curiously. “You mentioned you had an idea on how to fool the Headmaster while still maintaining our shields. Explain.”

Harry took a deep breath. “OK. My idea is this: pretend to give him what he wants.”

“And just how would we do this?” Daphne asked sarcastically.

“You know how much effort we put to organize our minds and keep our thoughts and emotions within our Occlumency shields?”

Everyone nodded. "What if we were to put thoughts and memories that we don't care too much about outside of our shields? And let's take it one step further: let's put in some false emotions as well!"

Theo's jaw dropped. "You're talking about creating a fake persona outside our shields, so if people try to read us, they see what we want them to?"

"Exactly!" Harry said triumphantly.

"Utter genius," Blaise commented, his eyes glazed. "Simple, and yet effective. A perfect example of why you are a Slytherin."

"Thank you," Harry said with a bow. *I'm rather proud of the idea myself. It's one of the best I've had since I became SeeD.*

"After we manage that, will you tell us your true past?" Hermione asked.

Harry hesitated, but nodded. "Yeah, I will. But none of you are going to like it."

The next day was devoted to creating their false personas. Each of them put memories of classes and studying Nicolas Flamel outside their shields; after all, that was what Dumbledore expected. They also created a false sense of awe and trust for Dumbledore in addition to small tidbits here and there to seem more realistic. Harry put the false memories planted by Dumbledore outside his shield to aid in the deception.

Harry tested each of his friends using Legilimency and nodded at each of them, pleased with their shields. If he didn't know any better, he'd say that they knew no Occlumency at all. If he ignored the memories, Harry knew he could dig deeper and hit the shield, but that wasn't necessary. "Be sure to keep updating the mask," Harry warned. "If Dumbledore doesn't find recent memories, then he'll realize what we've done. And, just in case, keep strengthening your inner shields."

Everyone nodded determinedly. "So, now let's hear your story," Theo said excitedly.

Harry looked around. They were in the room Harry had chosen for training. Harry raised his wand and focused on one of his spells. “*Silencio*,” he uttered, pointing at the door. “*Colloportus*.” The door was now locked and Silenced. The only reason he knew the fourth year Silencing Charm was because he’d recently focused entirely on it, knowing that such a charm could be incredibly useful for secret conversations like this. The locking charm, *Colloportus*, however, was only second year material. A simple *Alohomora* would unlock the door, if given enough power behind it. As such, it was commonly looked over for more advanced sealing charms.

Harry looked at his friends before closing his eyes and sighing. “You might want to sit down; it’s going to be a long story.” When they did, Harry sat in the Lotus position. “It all started the day I turned five years old. No, actually, it starts much before that. Ever since I was old enough to walk reliably, I was expected to do chores for the Dursleys. My bedroom was the cupboard under the stairs, and I was fed much less than Dudley. I never knew why. Now, I expect that they knew I was a wizard, and as such, thought me inhuman.”

“That’s just wrong!” Hermione protested.

Daphne looked darkly around her. “And that’s why there are so many wizards who despise Muggles. The abusers out there give everyone a bad name.”

“Ahem,” Harry cleared his throat, regaining the attention of his audience. “Since I was never allowed out of the house, I wanted to go outside more than anything else in the world so I could go out and make friends. So, when my Aunt Petunia told me on my fifth birthday that I would not be allowed to go to Muggle school, I was crushed. I ran out of the house, and wished with all my might to be somewhere, anywhere else.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “Six years ago, July thirty-first... there was a solar eclipse that day!”

Harry beamed at her. “Yeah, there was. Though I didn’t know it at the time, the solar eclipse magnified my powers to an incredible extent, and I disappeared from this world...” After Harry had explained everything, from the Terran magic to his own skills – including

demonstration and an introduction to Seth – he concluded with his search for Odin and learning portal magic. “... and then I traveled through the temporary portal I made to Privet Drive, where I received my invitation to come to Hogwarts from Dumbledore himself.”

“So, you’re what, seventeen?” Hermione asked.

Harry shook his head. “For some reason, the time streams synchronized when I was eight. So I’m fourteen, mentally, but eleven physically.”

“No wonder you’re so good at magic! You’ve had years of experience!” Theo said.

“Actually, no,” Harry admitted. “Terran magic involved drawing already-formed spells from the monsters and storing them for future use. Magic here needs me to shape the spell myself, which is more of a challenge. And my magical core isn’t making things easier, either, since it’s accustomed to only a few things, and allowing me to shape my own spells isn’t one of them. So I actually have a harder time than most. There’s a reason why I’ve read far ahead, but I can’t cast many spells above second year level. Only the Summoning Charm and the Silencing Charm, really.”

“Wait a minute,” Hermione said slowly. “If the scar link between you and You-Know-Who is the reason the worlds were becoming closer together, then why do you need to make a portal now that you’re in the same world?”

Harry sighed. “Unfortunately, I’m still the reason. Every Terran spell I use introduces that magical energy here, and creates a tie, albeit a small one, to that world. Hell, even keeping the Terran spells and Quetzalcoatl in me does that, but I can’t exactly do anything about it without basically destroying the world. Trust me; you don’t want me to unleash all my Ultima and Holy spells. Creating a few permanent portals will dramatically reduce the chances of a chaotic portal dropping off a monster anywhere. Unfortunately, the introduction of Sorceress-level power into our world is inevitable. The damage is done.”

"I see," Blaise said slowly. "How do you plan to handle that when it becomes an issue?"

"I'll take advantage of the portals and keep an eye on any Sorceresses. If they become a problem, then we can have SeeD eliminate them. That is, after all, the reason SeeD exists. However, it should not become a problem for quite some time." Harry cleared his throat. "In any case, I suggest we just enjoy the time we have. We've protected ourselves as best we can, and if we can trust Dumbledore for just one thing, it's his reputation. Any would-be thieves of the Sorcerer's Stone won't strike until he's out of the way."

"He's right," Theo said with a smile. "So, anyone up for a game of Exploding Snap?"

"Sure!"

Meanwhile, a certain Dark Lord bided his time from the back of his servant's head. As he had almost nothing but time at the moment, he thought about everything, from the Sorcerer's Stone to his eventual takeover. But there was one unsettling element, one that he hadn't considered. Harry Potter, the one who had reflected Voldemort's own Killing Curse back at him, was attending his first year at Hogwarts, and something about him sent shivers up Voldemort's proverbial spine, ones he had previously attributed to incredibly powerful magic. It was the sense that he had around his Horcruxes. It was the sense of power gained through death.

As a mere spirit, Voldemort's ability to sense magical power and life force had grown considerably, no longer inhibited by his body's limits. It was the sole reason he had survived the past ten years; without eyes or any other kind of sense, Voldemort had to rely on this ability to find animals to possess. If he did not possess an animal, he weakened quickly, his soul energy waning. Only whole souls could become ghosts, capable of sustaining themselves on the magic in the air. But Voldemort had only 1/64 of his soul.

Voldemort shook his metaphorical head of such thoughts, returning to the subject of Harry Potter. *Perhaps I could sway him to my side,* Voldemort mused. *He is undoubtedly powerful, even at this age. He is obviously familiar with death and having him at my side would*

prevent the prophecy that led me to attack him from being completed. Yes, that would be the best outcome. The best way would probably be to offer his parents back through a bit of Necromancy. Potter, I shall have you by my side, and together we shall rule the world!

All Voldemort had to do now was simply wait for the fool Dumbledore to leave Hogwarts for a day or so. *The fool never questioned where Quirrell learned Occlumency.* What he didn't know was that Dumbledore *knew* he was there, and had planned on the Dark Lord's presence to test Harry Potter.

Both Voldemort and Dumbledore wanted Harry as their weapon, for Light or for Dark. But Harry was no fool, and each chessmaster would learn the power of Harry's wrath before the end.

Well, there ends Chapter 7! Only one more chapter to go until this particular book is finished, and then you get to read "Worldly Secrets"! Anyway, as always, read and review! Hope I made Voldemort realistic.

Chapter Eight: Confrontations

It was in February that Hermione came to Harry and his friends with astounding news. "You're not going to believe this, but Hagrid's hatched a dragon!"

Harry looked at Theo, who looked at Daphne, who looked at Blaise, who looked back at Harry. Then everyone turned to Hermione. "We believe it," they said in unison.

Hermione shuddered. "That was just creepy. But back to the subject, Hagrid's got a dragon, a Norwegian Ridgeback!"

"Who all knows?" Blaise asked calmly.

"Ron Weasley, Dean Thomas, Hagrid and now us," Hermione summarized.

"Damn, Weasley knows!" Harry cursed.

"Perhaps we can take advantage of that," Daphne mused.

"How so?"

"Well, Weasley has a bunch of siblings, right?"

Harry's eyes widened. "That's right! I remember Weasley mentioning that one of his brothers was a dragon keeper in Romania!"

Theo put the pieces together quickly. "So we get Weasley to write his brother about the dragon, and said brother takes care of it for us?"

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "I wouldn't care if Weasley got himself in trouble, but Hagrid's a good man, even if he does have a penchant for dangerous beasts."

"There is one problem," Blaise reminded them all. "Ronald Weasley will not cooperate if anyone from Slytherin orders him to. It must be Hermione."

All eyes turned to Hermione, who stiffened, but then nodded resignedly as she turned to leave. "For the record, I'm only talking to him because I have to."

Half an hour later, Hermione returned, her face flushed not with embarrassment, but with anger. "That arrogant little *git*!"

Blaise found himself on his feet, though he knew not why. "What happened? Did he reject the idea?"

Hermione, to everyone's surprise, growled. "Weasley took the idea all right. And then he had the absolute nerve to claim the idea as his own and then demand that I help him with his homework! He didn't even wait for my response, he just left to send off the letter!" She clenched her fists. "Ooh, I wish that dragon would just bite his hand off!"

A few days later, Hermione had more news. "I have good news and better news, which do you want to hear first?" she asked brightly.

"Good, then better," Harry decided.

"Well, Charlie – that's Ron Weasley's brother – has agreed to take Norbert – that's the dragon's name – off our hands."

Theo smiled, while Daphne's grin turned feral. "And the better news?"

"Ron Weasley is in the hospital wing with dragon poisoning. Norbert bit him in the hand," Hermione revealed in a grandiose fashion before laughing with the others.

Theo, in between chuckles, managed to say "Hey, why don't you wish me a million Galleons!"

Another roar of laughter. "And me, the Great Library of Alexandria! I'll share!" Blaise got out. The game went on with more and more ludicrous wishes for quite some time until Hermione managed to calm them down enough to do their homework. The odd snigger or chuckle, however, was left alone.

Unfortunately for Harry and Hermione, the next day Ron demanded Hermione to get the dragon to the meeting place for Charlie. Hermione knew there was no one else, and so she reluctantly agreed, convincing Harry to help. The two of them would carry Norbert underneath the Invisibility Cloak.

Harry met up with Hermione outside the Gryffindor Common Room underneath the Invisibility Cloak, and the two quickly made their way to Hagrid's hut.

"Goodbye, Norbert," Hagrid said tearfully. "I've packed yer teddy so yeh won't be lonely!" Harry would have raised an eyebrow if it would not have delayed them. *That teddy's going to be shreds by the time Norbert gets to Romania.* "Thanks again, Hermione, Harry. Yeh didn't have ter do this, but yeh are."

"Not a problem, Hagrid," Harry said soothingly. "But we should probably get going if we're going to meet Charlie in the Astronomy Tower."

Harry and Hermione got there just fine, and Harry stuffed his Invisibility Cloak in his pocket when he saw several figures on broomsticks flying in. They passed Norbert off, and then went downstairs. It was only when Filch saw them that they realized that Harry had forgotten to take out the Cloak and cover them with it.

"Well, well, well. A Gryffindor and a Slytherin out of bed!" Filch cackled.

"We don't have time for this," Harry growled, pulling out his wand and focusing his will on making Filch forget. "*Obliviate!*"

Filch was obviously not expecting that, and the spell hit him dead on. Harry quickly removed the memories of the last few minutes and pulled a shocked Hermione down the stairs with him, covering her and himself with his father's cloak.

A minute later, Filch shook his head. "Stupid stairs..."

"Harry!" Hermione hissed at her best friend. "You just Obliviated Filch!"

“Yeah,” Harry acknowledged quietly. “Your point is? We just did Hagrid a favor and kept him from being fired as gamekeeper. Breeding dragons is illegal in Britain! I’m pretty sure we’re entitled to make sure we don’t get in trouble for it. We could be expelled!”

“I suppose so,” Hermione reluctantly agreed. “Just, please, don’t do it again.”

“Alright, Hermione.”

The rest of February and March passed quickly for Harry and his friends, as they relaxed and had fun. Pranking season was back on, and they even had a friendly prank war with the Weasley Twins. That ended in a truce with no clear victor, given that none of the pranks were meant maliciously – with the minor exceptions of Draco Malfoy and Ron Weasley, who still spread rumors about Harry and called Hermione as a traitor. Ever so slowly, the school seemed to realize that Harry had yet to terrorize anyone. In fact, he was often seen in the library talking and laughing with both Slytherins and a solitary Gryffindor, and Harry offered to help anyone in his year who came to him. The first person to take him up on that offer was Neville Longbottom, who Hermione confirmed had always backed Harry up. As such, he was a bit of a loner in Gryffindor as well.

Neville had a strange problem with his memory, Harry discovered. He always seemed to forget things, no matter how hard he tried to remember. It was almost as if he had a recurring Memory Charm. Nevertheless, Harry helped him as best he could. Unfortunately, due to Neville’s memory problem, Harry couldn’t trust him with his secrets, but Harry had no problem letting Neville know that he considered the forgetful boy a good, loyal friend. “If you ever need some my help, let me know,” Harry told Neville. “It’s the least I can do for standing up for me to your housemates. And if I find a way to fix that memory problem of yours, I’ll let you know.”

After that, a few hesitant Hufflepuffs approached Harry. They spread the word when Harry treated them not with pity, nor disdain, but respect. “You’re hard working, and loyal. That’s not a bad thing in my book” were the exact words Harry used. Slowly, Harry’s reputation rose from “Dark Lord in training” to “nice, for a Slytherin.”

Dumbledore was fooled by Harry's Occlumency deception, as was Snape. Snape was slowly becoming disillusioned to Dumbledore's methods, but he could do nothing. In return for keeping him out of Azkaban, Dumbledore had demanded an Unbreakable Vow of loyalty. Ever since Potter saved Snape's life, Snape had watched Potter grow with his friends. He watched with no small amount of envy as Potter laughed and had fun with both Slytherins and Gryffindors. Snape found himself wishing that his own school days had been like that. *Perhaps then I wouldn't have taken the Dark Mark and fucked up my entire life. Then I wouldn't be in this situation.*

And then Snape thought about that Memory Charm Dumbledore had placed on Potter. *Why? What purpose did Dumbledore have?* So, one day in March, after Potions class, Snape held him back. "Mr. Potter, I have something I need to tell you."

"Yes, Professor?" Harry asked.

Snape cast several silent spells at the door before he looked directly at Harry. "You have been Obliviated. It happened the morning you received your schedule during the first semester." Snape couldn't divulge just who had done it, but that didn't prevent him from going around the Unbreakable Vow and letting Harry find out.

Harry looked at Snape critically. "I see. Thank you for telling me this, but why now? Why are you telling me?"

Snape could lie, but decided that he would at least try to look out for Potter. After all, he was in Slytherin house, and Potter's parents were dead. He had no one else, or so Snape thought. "As you may have heard, I hated your father, and he hated me," Snape told Harry. "When you first arrived, I assumed you were just like him, and treated you accordingly. In fact, I helped set you up for the Memory Charm. But, over the last few months I've seen more of your mother's personality in you than your father's. I have come to the conclusion that you should have your true memories, and I apologize for helping take them from you in the first place." He raised his wand, but Harry stopped him with a held-up hand.

"I thank you, Professor, for finally telling me. I have known about the Memory Charm for months, and it's been taken care of," Harry said

quietly, yet firmly. He extended his right hand. "I believe we got off to a rocky start. Let's start over. My name is Harry Potter of Slytherin House."

"Severus Snape, Head of Slytherin," the Professor replied, gripping Harry's hand. And thus started a relationship of mentor and student. Unlike McGonagall, Snape had no qualms giving Harry extra lessons if he was ready for it, but even so they had to disguise it. So, Harry let Draco sabotage his potion next class, and Snape pretended to blame Harry for it. "That'll be two weeks of detention, Potter," he said with a silky smile. "Come to my office at seven tonight."

Harry plastered a look of outrage on his face, barely managing to hide his glee at the successful deception. That night, he went to Snape's office, concealing his eagerness until he was safely there.

"I shall not be teaching you Transfiguration nor Charms," Snape said shortly. "I specialize in Potions, the Dark Arts, and Defense Against the Dark Arts. I cannot teach you the Dark Arts or Defense, however, due to circumstances beyond either of our control. That leaves the noble art of Potions. I understand you have great knowledge of the herbs and their properties?"

Harry nodded. He had almost memorized *1001 Magical Herbs and Fungi*. But unfortunately, that listed their general properties. He did not know how the time factor affected potions or ingredients, nor did he know how strong the properties were in each of the herbs.

"Good," Snape said, pleased. "That makes my job easier. Now, as you know, the environment has a powerful influence on the properties of ingredients. For instance, Fluxweed, for maximum potency, should be picked during the full moon..."

At the end of the lesson, Harry looked at Snape curiously. "What circumstance prevents you from teaching the Dark Arts or Defense?"

Snape looked at Harry piercingly, wishing he could reveal the Unbreakable Vow. "I have been forbidden from speaking of it. That is all I can say about it." Harry nodded, deciding to pursue the matter at a later date; he had other things to worry about. Namely, the Sorcerer's Stone. Snape then assigned Harry to go collect a few

choice herbs from the Forbidden Forest with Hagrid the following night as his next detention.

Hagrid looked rather wary as he strapped on his crossbow. "Come along, Harry."

"What's wrong?" Harry asked, concerned.

"Summat's been killing unicorns," Hagrid said gravely. "Dunno what, but whatever it is, it's a mighty powerful Dark creature. Unicorns are right hard to catch."

Hagrid led Harry to a place where the herbs Harry needed grew, and Harry carefully harvested them. A high-pitch whinny drew both their attentions to a fleeing glowing unicorn and a wraith-like being chasing it. "*Avada Kedavra!*" it cried, sending a green jet of light that struck the white unicorn, instantly killing it.

Harry suddenly suffered a flashback at the green light.

Flashback

Harry was tiny, and felt safe and warm in his mother's arms. Then the door burst open, and his Papa took out his magic stick and stood. "Run, Lily! Take Harry and run!"

A dark, cloaked figure stood in the doorway, stepping across easily. "How noble, James Potter. Sacrificing yourself to save your family. Too bad your sacrifice is for naught! Avada Kedavra!" he screamed in a high, cold voice.

Harry was confused, but instinctively knew that he needed to stay quiet as his mother rushed up the stairs. The dark man walked calmly after them, and Harry's wide green eyes watched.

"Silly girl, move aside. My target is not you, but the babe you carry."

"No, anything but Harry!" Mama begged.

The dark man seemed to sigh. "Avada Kedavra!" A green light hit Mama and Harry could feel her warmth go away as she fell. He

glared up at the dark man, wanting him to fall down too. He felt warmth he knew as his mother's rising up, and her voice echoed in his mind. :Holy!: Harry could feel his mother's magic give up everything it had to do this one, last spell.

"Avada Kedavra!"

The green light hit Harry on the forehead before it was blasted back at the dark man.

End Flashback

Harry snapped out of it as the wraith approached him, causing terrible pain in his scar. His eyes blazed as he drew his wand.

:You are at a severe disadvantage!: Quetzalcoatl protested. :Your scar pains you terribly, and that must mean that this wraith is Voldemort! Voldemort was known to be Dumbledore's equal! You must flee!:

Harry knew his tenant was right, even as he clapped his other hand to his scar, biting back the pain. "Hagrid, we have to go! That's Voldemort!"

Hagrid's eyes were wide as he whirled on Harry. "That's *who?*"

"Just run!" Harry ordered.

"I can't leave yeh behind!"

"How touching," a high, cold voice said. "*Avada Kedavra!*" The spell hurtled directly for Hagrid...

A moment later, Harry had pushed Hagrid to the side, and had bent himself backwards at the waist, allowing the Killing Curse to pass by harmlessly over him. "Hagrid, come *on!*"

Hagrid, showing a grace that belied his size, picked Harry up and threw him over his shoulder as he ran. A minute later, Hagrid set down a now bruised Harry. "How d'ya know that was You-Know-Who?" Hagrid wheezed.

“My scar.” Harry pointed at it. “It’s a link between me and him, and it hurts when I’m near him. Back there my scar pain was incredible, much more than ever before.”

“We’ve gotta go tell Dumbledore!” Hagrid said, his eyes wide.

For once, I agree. “Let’s go!”

A few minutes later, Harry and Hagrid were entering Dumbledore’s office. A minute after that, and Dumbledore was wearing a very concerned look on his face. “This is very troubling,” he told Hagrid and Harry. “He was previously hiding in the forests of Romania, nothing but mere spirit.”

“But he had a *body*,” Hagrid pointed out.

“He must be possessing someone else’s body to drink the unicorn blood,” Dumbledore concluded. “The question is simply who.”

Harry suspected Quirrell, but had no proof. For all he knew, it could be someone from Hogsmeade. “What’s so special about unicorn blood?”

Dumbledore looked at Harry gravely. “Unicorn blood has the power to keep someone alive, even if they are an inch from death itself. But to slay such a pure creature is a sinister act, one of the deepest imaginable. From the moment the blood touches the drinker’s lips, he shall live a half-life, a cursed life. Voldemort would hardly curse himself to such a life unless he had a way to get out of it. Harry, I know that you and your friends have discovered what we are hiding here at Hogwarts.”

Harry put on a mask of surprise. “You know that we know about the Sorcerer’s Stone? How?”

“I have my ways,” Dumbledore said, eyes twinkling merrily. “In any case, Voldemort must want to acquire the Stone and use the Elixir of Life to achieve immortality and regain a body of his own.” Harry was unsurprised, but allowed his face to adopt a look of horror. “But do not worry. The teachers have the Stone well protected.”

I'll believe it when I see it, Harry thought to himself, while injecting an emotion of acceptance into his false persona. He nodded, and Dumbledore looked pleased. "Go on to bed, now. I'm sure Professor Snape will permit your experience to excuse you from this detention. Hagrid, please stay behind."

Harry left and indeed did go to bed. *Voldemort...* Harry mused. *Just how strong are you as a spirit? You are neither dead nor alive, so how do we get rid of you? And just how did you survive your own Killing Curse all those years ago?*

:And I have one more question to add to the list. How did your mother cast Terran magic?:

Harry told his friends just what had happened the next day. "Quirrell's not after the Stone for himself, but for Voldemort. If that happens... well, he'll return."

Everyone was pale at the prospect. "Do you reckon he'll try to, you know, finish the job he started ten years ago?" Hermione asked quietly.

"Probably," Harry admitted. "After all, I am the reason he lost his power. He'll kill me not only for revenge, but to lower the moral of the people. That'll make it easier to take over." He clenched his fist. "But he'll have a hell of a time taking me down."

"You won't be alone," Daphne said sternly. "We're helping too!"

Harry looked at his friends with a raised eyebrow. "I've got nothing against you, but do you honestly think that if I went all out, any of you could even match a third of my power?" No one met his eye. "You're my friends, some of the best I've ever had really, but you aren't fighters."

"Not yet," Blaise agreed. "But we are willing to learn. Are we not?" Hermione, Theo and Daphne nodded together.

Harry looked at his friends critically. "Are you sure? I shall help you with whatever special abilities you have, but the majority of training will be concern going beyond normal human limits in physical fitness

and strength. I will take you to Terra and you will learn the weapon of your choice as a backup if your wand is taken. You will face monsters and take their magic and strength. I will be devoting time to you that I could be using for myself, and as such, you are not to waste my time. If you have a problem with any of this, tell me now.” No one spoke. “Good. We start tomorrow. Meet me in the Great Hall at five o’clock sharp.”

The next morning, four sleepy-looking eleven-year-olds met a wide-awake Harry Potter in the Great Hall. He nodded sharply. “Come on. We’ll eat after the morning exercise.”

“Wha’ we doin’?” Daphne slurred sleepily as Harry took them outside to the lake.

“Running. Now give me five laps around the lake!”

“Aw, man!” Theo moaned as the four of them started running slowly.

“Faster, or I’ll use Thunder!” Harry threatened as he followed. That woke them up, and they picked up the pace. Finally, the five laps were complete, and the four children unused to strenuous exercise collapsed on the ground. “Good, you’re ready for the next exercise,” Harry said in a pleased tone, though he knew full well that they were tired. “Give me twenty crunches!”

“What’s a crunch?” Theo asked bluntly. Harry demonstrated, and it didn’t seem too hard... until it came time for them to do it.

“Ow...” Hermione moaned as her belly ached after number thirteen.

“Umph,” Theo grunted.

“Why the hell does this hurt so much? It’s not even that much movement!” Daphne demanded of the air.

Harry decided to answer her. “The muscles in your stomach are being stretched and compressed repeatedly, and you’re burning fat into energy.”

Daphne paused and stared at Harry. “Are you calling me fat?” she asked dangerously.

Harry blinked, wondering why Daphne seemed so offended. “Not overly so, but everyone, even me, has some fat. If we didn’t, then we wouldn’t have enough stored energy to do what we do daily. Fat is merely stored energy.”

Daphne seemed satisfied with the response and resumed her exercise. After they were done, Harry had them do jumping jacks and push-ups. When they were done, Harry led his exhausted friends back to eat some breakfast, which rejuvenated them to the point that they were no longer ready to return to bed.

The next few weeks showed a marked improvement in the physiques of Harry’s friends. Theo, the tallest and lankiest of them all, had filled out a bit with muscle, while Blaise, who was shorter than Harry and more broad, converted some of his fat to muscle. The girls didn’t look like bodybuilders, but each was slim and fit. Once, Harry had commented that Hermione and Daphne would have no lack of male attention in a few years, making both of them blush.

The time was right to teach them how to use their primary non-wand weapon, but as Hermione correctly pointed out, the exams were approaching, and they simply had no time to devote to learning a new weapon. Harry reluctantly agreed.

Harry’s thoughts drifted frequently to the Sorcerer’s Stone, however. A trip to Hagrid’s had revealed that whoever Voldemort was possessing knew how to get past Fluffy, the three-headed dog. *I wonder why a Killing Curse would not suffice?* Harry wondered. *Perhaps there are wards around Hogwarts that detect its use? After all, Voldemort would want to be in and out without alerting anyone, especially Dumbledore.*

Knowing that Dumbledore was essentially the only reason Voldemort had not yet attempted to steal the Stone, Harry made sure he knew where Dumbledore was. His Legilimency was still rudimentary – meaning that he could view surface thoughts and emotions, but he could not delve into memories – so Harry had to make do with his own observations.

Then, on the day after the last final exams, Harry overheard McGonagall informing Snape that Dumbledore had to go the Ministry of Magic and wouldn't be back until the next day. He took a deep breath, centering his thoughts, and entered.

"Yes, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall asked.

"The Sorcerer's Stone is in danger," Harry said bluntly.

McGonagall's jaw dropped in shock, while Snape looked calm as ever. "How do you know about the Stone?" McGonagall asked quietly.

"I have my ways," Harry said vaguely, and Snape smirked at that behind McGonagall's back. *No Slytherin would willingly give up their source of information*, Snape thought approvingly. *Not when they have the chance to still be useful*. "In any case," Harry continued, "has Dumbledore informed you of Voldemort's appearance in the Forbidden Forest?"

"What?" Snape and McGonagall blurted. *The Dark Lord has returned?* Snape thought. "He was there?"

"In the flesh," Harry answered, and then thought better of his words. "Well, not *his* flesh, per say. He apparently possessed someone else to drink unicorn blood."

McGonagall paled and sat down heavily. "Why would he not tell me?" she murmured to herself.

"I have no idea," Harry answered honestly. "But consider this: Dumbledore is the only one Voldemort was ever afraid of, right?" McGonagall nodded. "Then the perfect time for him to strike is when Dumbledore's gone. And that means that he'll strike, tonight and steal the Stone from under our noses."

"A logical conclusion," Snape agreed. He turned to McGonagall. "Minerva, we must increase the protections against intrusion."

"Perhaps it would be wise if we took shifts guarding the passage." McGonagall said slowly. "If You-Know-Who does not have a body of his own, then surely either of us can out-duel an intruder."

“Unfortunately, the Headmaster has me brewing several very delicate potions that will require my full attention tonight,” Snape said smoothly with a hint of apology. *This is true... I bet Dumbledore planned this, didn't he...* “I’m afraid I cannot help you. In my place, I suggest Filius. He was a dueling champion himself, and he has lost little if any of his strength.”

“Yes, Filius is a good choice,” McGonagall agreed. She turned to Harry. “Mr. Potter, thank you for bringing this to my attention. Please enjoy the rest of the day; we have the situation handled.”

I'll believe it when I see it, Harry thought darkly, but gave a small smile and left to tell his friends. Naturally, they were all concerned. The rest of that day, Harry reviewed a few of the battle spells he knew with his friends. Among them were *Expelliarmus*, *Petrificus Totalus*, *Locomotor Mortis* and *Silencio*, but Harry made sure everyone understood that lots of other seemingly harmless spells could be used offensively.

At six o'clock, two hours from curfew, the students were slowly thinning out and returning to the common rooms. At curfew, no one was out, so Harry brought out his Invisibility Cloak. “*Engorgio*.” The Cloak expanded to be large enough to cover Harry and all four of his friends, and they hid underneath it slowly making their way to the forbidden corridor.

The reason for the slowness was simply the inexperience of moving together underneath the Cloak without giving themselves away. There were several muffled yelps as toes were trod on, but slowly they got used to it and moved faster. All in all, it took approximately twenty minutes. *Pathetic*, Harry thought in disgust. *We need to work on this moving together thing.*

:Now's not the time: Quetzalcoatl reminded his host.

When they reached the forbidden corridor, Flitwick was on the ground, apparently knocked out. “Shit,” Harry said succinctly, “he’s already in. Let’s go.”

They entered the room where the three-headed dog was fast asleep, listening to an enchanted harp. Harry tucked away the Invisibility

Cloak and pulled out his wand. "*Wingardium Leviosa*," he snapped, and the paw covering the trap door lifted a little ways off the ground. "I'll hold the spell, you see what's below."

"Right." The four of them quickly went over and opened the trap door. Hermione squinted into the darkness. "I can't see anything."

"We'll have to jump!" Theo concluded, but Daphne smacked him.

"Why don't we levitate each other down?" she asked in a false sweet voice.

Theo gulped, recognizing her "you better do it or else" voice. "Right," he said in a higher voice than usual. "*Wingardium Leviosa!*"

Daphne, Blaise and Theo were down when Harry realized that something was missing. "The music!" Hermione gasped, apparently thinking along the same lines. "The harp's not playing anymore!"

Indeed, the three-headed dog was waking up. *Well, this is a Cerberus, maybe it'll communicate with a Terran.* "Cerberus!" Harry greeted. "I mean you no harm."

The dog heads looked at each other. "Then why do you trespass on my domain?" the middle head demanded with a growl. Hermione looked agape, but before she could do anything, Blaise had started levitating her down.

"There is an evil magic-user who has come to steal what you were placed here to guard," Harry said carefully. "I have come to stop him."

"He is the one who put me to sleep not long ago?"

"Yes."

"I see," Cerberus growled in his deep, throaty voice. "How did you know how to address me?"

"I have lived the majority of my life on Terra," Harry acknowledged. "I returned less than a year ago to prevent my nemesis below from gaining power."

“And if I aim to stop you from going after him?”

“Then I will have no choice but to eliminate you, though I must assure you that I am in quite a hurry, so I’ll have to beat you quick,” Harry taunted, drawing his gunblade.

To his surprise, the dog started laughing in a barking manner. “A man after my own heart. I can tell you already have Quetzalcoatl with you, but I believe I will join you after I say my goodbye to the half-giant known as Hagrid.” He stepped aside. “Go fight the battle you came here to do. I shall await you in the Forbidden Forest after term ends.”

Harry nodded sharply and jumped down the trap door, where he quickly ascertained that his four companions were struggling with some sort of plant. “What is this thing?!” he demanded of Hermione.

“Devil’s Snare!” she answered. “I remember reading about this in Herbology class! It prefers dark, damp places...”

“Then we need a fire!” Harry said in realization. Since he was the only one with his arms available to him – the Devil’s Snare was starting to crush his friends, and they were unable to move – Harry raised his wand... or he tried to.

Harry’s arms had suddenly been pinned by a very strong multilayered set of vines. He glanced around and saw Blaise in a safe area, apparently having managed to escape. Blaise sighed. “Why am I the only one with the common sense to get out of the way of an obvious trap? *Incendio!*”

From Blaise’s wand emerged a small fireball, which struck near Theo. Theo was struggling the hardest against the Snare, which only made it tighten even more, so Blaise had aimed at him to save him. The Devil’s Snare recoiled from the fire, and released its hold on the boy, who scrambled to safety near Blaise, who had just then used *Incendio* again to make the Devil’s Snare near Hermione to back off. The three nodded at each other and raised their wands. “*Incendio!*”

Moments later, Harry and Daphne were free. Daphne stretched her shoulders. “Glad we got out of that one. Lucky Blaise got out the way.”

"It is quite fortunate that Hermione pays attention in Herbology," Blaise added with an appreciative look at Hermione. "I would not have attacked otherwise, as I had no way of knowing if it would merely tighten its grip on you."

Knowing your enemy's weakness is a great asset, Harry thought to himself, but he needs to be able to act even without that information. Nevertheless, Blaise will definitely appreciate the Scan spell. "Let's move on."

"What happened with Fluffy up there?" Hermione asked.

"Fluffy is actually a Guardian Force generally known as Cerberus. He will only speak human when recognized as a sentient being. When it's summoned, it can cast Triple on the summoner and his allies. Triple will, as the name suggests, triple the person's casting speed."

Everyone whistled at the idea. "That's quite a powerful spell," Blaise said slowly.

"Where can I get me one of those?" Theo asked eagerly.

Harry grinned at his exuberance. "Tell you what, I already have a Guardian Force to work with, so you can use this one. Just be sure to treat him well."

"Really? Wicked!"

"Wait, aren't you giving away too much?" Daphne asked, worried. "What if Dumbledore's around, invisible?"

"I'd have sensed him by now," Harry said simply. "I can sense magic, and Dumbledore's got a huge store of it. He's nowhere near."

With that note, they entered the next room. It seemed empty, except for the sound of flapping. The door was nearby, so Daphne went to try that first. "It's locked. *Alohomora!*" Nothing happened. "Damn, now what?"

Harry squinted upwards and saw dozens of birds. "Wait, those aren't birds! Those are *keys*!" He whirled. "Daphne, what kind of key are we looking for?"

"Looks like it's fairly big, old-fashioned... probably silver like the handle."

Harry was not the youngest Seeker in a century for nothing, and his sharp eyes quickly spotted a key fitting Daphne's description. The clincher was the fact that the key in question had a bent, perhaps broken, wing. "Found it! *Accio* key!" Nothing happened.

"Apparently it's charmed so it can't be Summoned like that," Hermione mused. "A good idea, since that's the first thing You-Know-Who would have tried."

"Lookie here!" Theo cried. "Brooms!"

Everything was suddenly made clear. "We are expected to fly and catch the key," Blaise summed up.

"Looks like this was designed as a test for me," Harry said slowly. "After all, I am the youngest Seeker in a century." He pulled his Nimbus 2000 out of his Item Bag and got on. "Back in a minute."

Once Harry was up in the air, catching the elusive key was much like catching a spotted Snitch. After less than a minute of chasing the thing – the key was meant to be difficult to catch by a weak broomstick, not by a top-of-the-line Nimbus – Harry brought the key down and unlocked the door before placing his Nimbus back in the Item Bag.

"This thing comes in handy," Harry said with a smirk, patting his Item Bag.

"I'll bet!" Theo agreed.

"Each of the teachers must have contributed a protection," Hermione realized as they entered the next room. "Hagrid gave Fluffy, the Devil's Snare was obviously Sprout's and the keys were charmed by

Flitwick. That leaves McGonagall's, Quirrell's, Snape's and Dumbledore's."

The room they entered was dark, and had large statues lined up in rows. "A graveyard?" Blaise murmured.

"Maybe, this place does feel a little ominous," Harry answered.

Then the lights came on, and Theo recognized it first. "It's a giant chessboard!"

"Now what?" Harry asked.

"It's obvious isn't it?" Daphne said with a smirk. "We have to play our way across the room."

"Who's the best strategist among us?" Hermione asked.

"Daphne's wicked good at chess," Theo volunteered. It was true. Daphne played often, and had never yet lost, even against older Slytherins and the occasional Ravenclaw.

"Okay then... let's see." She tapped one of the knights, which abruptly came to life. "Do we have to join you to get across?" The black knight nodded. Daphne looked at the others. "Apparently we need to take the place of five of the black pieces." Another brief pause. "Hermione, you take that queen. Harry, you're the king. Blaise, you're the kingside rook. Theo, you're the knight on the other side, and I'll be a bishop."

The chess pieces were apparently listening, as the pieces specified turned their backs on the white pieces and walked off the board. Everyone took their place, and the game began. The white pieces moved first, and then Daphne, carefully calculating the situation, sent out the black pieces.

Daphne was visibly sweating lightly as she was very careful to keep her friends out of danger. Surprisingly, it was Theo who brought her out of an incoming breakdown. "Daphne, don't worry! Even if we're taken, I'm certain we won't be killed! After all, the teachers wouldn't kill anyone, just injure them enough that they could be interrogated

later.” That loosened Daphne up a bit, and she gave them all a soft smile.

The first of them to be taken was Theo, actually. “I’m sorry, Theo,” Daphne whispered to him, tears threatening to fall from her eyes.

“No worries,” Theo said lightly. “I can see the next few moves anyway. We’re close to winning.”

And then Theo was smacked off the chessboard by the bishop who had taken him. Harry saw that Theo was bleeding a bit, so he extended a hand and sent a quiet Cure spell at him, which restored some of his color and mostly healed the gash. Daphne sent him a grateful look.

Unfortunately, the white pieces managed to get out of checkmate in that time, so Daphne had to sacrifice Blaise, who walked calmly to his own doom from an enemy castle. Harry cast a Cure spell in his direction as well. “Harry, Hermione, I’m about to be taken. Hermione, when I am, go forward four squares and that’ll be checkmate,” Daphne ordered.

Harry and Hermione nodded grimly. *Three allies taken out in one go*, Harry thought to himself. *McGonagall certainly picked a good task to cut down the numbers*. Daphne was knocked out by the queen with a single smack, and then Hermione checkmated the white king, who threw down his crown. The white pieces left.

“Well we have to go on,” Harry murmured after quickly arranging his friends to be comfortable at the wall.

“Yeah,” Hermione agreed quietly.

“I’m pretty sure that one was McGonagall’s protection,” Harry said as they walked into the next room. “She must have animated the chessmen.”

Suddenly a horrible stench met Harry’s nostrils and his eyes widened. It was a stench he recognized, and apparently Hermione did too if her sudden glance at him was anything to go by. “Troll,” Harry identified. Hermione nodded. Thankfully, as they rounded the corner, they saw

that the troll was knocked out with a nasty bump on its head. "Glad we didn't have to fight that one," Harry commented as they went to the next room.

The instant Harry and Hermione passed through the entrance, purple fire erupted behind them, and black fire came out from the exit. There were bottles of all sorts of shapes and sizes on a table with a sheet of paper, so Hermione went to that, while Harry decided to try another Terran spell.

"Water!" A surge of water slammed into the purple fire, which had no effect. He tried again against the black fire, with the same result. "Damn," Harry cursed.

"Harry, look at this!" Hermione called. "This has clues to tell us which potion will get us through the fire!" Harry glanced at the paper, quickly reading it.

*Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,
Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,
One among us seven will let you move ahead
Another will transport the drinker back instead,
Two among our number hold only nettle wind,
Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.
Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,
To help you in your choice, we give these clues four:
First, however slyly the poison tries to hide
You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;
Second, different are those who stand at either end,
But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;*

*Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,
Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;
Fourth, the second left and the second on the right
Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.*

“Interesting, logic puzzle,” Harry mused.

“It’s perfect!” Hermione breathed. “Loads of wizards don’t have an ounce of logic in them! They’d be stuck here forever.”

“This is definitely Snape’s task,” Harry said flatly. “He’d love to torture some poor wizard like this. ‘Which potion will kill me? Which potion do I need to go on? Oh, but what if that’s poison?’ I swear, the man is sadistic sometimes.”

Hermione was busy working on the riddle. After a few minutes, she figured out which were which, clapping her hands in delight. “The smallest bottle will get us through the black fire – towards the Stone.”

Harry looked at the tiny bottle skeptically. “That’s hardly one swallow. Only one person can go on.” Hermione and Harry looked at each other. “Hermione, drink the one that takes you back through the purple and go take care of the others. Grab brooms from the flying key room and get out of here. See if Flitwick’s awake yet. If he isn’t, go send an owl to Dumbledore. Much as I hate to admit it, we need his power here. I’m no match for Voldemort.”

Hermione’s lip trembled, and then she threw her arms around Harry, pulling him close into a hug. Harry blinked before returning the hug. “I’ll hold him off while I can,” Harry said.

“You’re a great wizard, you know.”

Harry looked up at the ceiling. “Maybe, but I wonder if I’d have been as great if I hadn’t lived in Terra for nine years...” He shook his head. “Hermione, you are the great witch here. I’ve just lived longer, that’s all.”

“Me? My strength is books! And cleverness! There are far more important things, like friendship, loyalty and bravery... Harry, *be careful!*”

Harry smirked at her. “Careful? Me? You obviously have me mixed up with someone else. But don’t worry, I’ll be fine. Remember that I have my good old Cure spells if I need a quick fix.”

Hermione smiled a little. “Let’s drink together.”

Harry grinned. “I don’t need it; I’m immune to magical fire thanks to my junctions. In fact, I get healed by it.”

Hermione looked quite cross at Harry. “Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“Because I needed to make sure you were fine before I go face Voldemort.”

Hermione’s face softened before she drank the potion. She shuddered. “It’s not poison, is it?” Harry asked anxiously. “I can cure it if it is!”

“No – but it’s like ice.”

“Then quick, go, before it wears off.”

“Good luck.” Hermione rushed through the purple fire, and Harry turned to the black fire, making sure his Firaga was junctioned to his elemental defense stat. He swiped one hand through the fire, and it felt nice. Pleased with the development, Harry stepped through the fire, instantly feeling rejuvenated and ready for anything.

Then, he was in the last chamber. There was already someone there. “Quirrell,” Harry greeted coldly.

“Potter,” Quirrell responded. “I wondered whether I’d be meeting you here.”

“I suspected you were after the Stone for Voldemort, but I never could prove it,” Harry returned. “I see you lost your stutter. Nice act.”

"Thank you. You are very lucky it seems. I was trying to kill you that first Quidditch match, but an earthquake brought me to my knees, breaking my eye contact with you. I would have had it too, if it hadn't been for Snape muttering a countercurse."

"Interesting, so he was trying to pay off the life debt he owed me," Harry muttered.

Not hearing this, Quirrell went on. "You're too nosy to live, Potter. Scurrying around the school on Halloween like that, for all I knew you'd seen me coming to look at what was guarding the Stone."

"I should have realized that it was you who sent in the troll," Harry said, cursing himself for not seeing the connection sooner. "The troll back there was one of yours?"

"Of course. I have a special gift with trolls. Snape managed to intercept me last Halloween, and he never trusted me again." Quirrell snapped his fingers and ropes sprang out of thin air, wrapping themselves tightly around Harry, who was quite impressed at the silent wandless magic. "Now wait quietly, Potter. I need to examine this interesting mirror."

Harry's eyes glittered as he quickly ran through his options. Then he saw exactly what lay behind Quirrell. It was the Mirror of Erised. He ignored Quirrell's mumbling about it. *I need to find a way to get into position. What I want most right now is to find the stone before Quirrell does, so I should see myself finding it. That should tell me exactly where it's hidden. But right now, I've got to distract Quirrell.* "So, do you serve Voldemort, or are you out for your own gain?"

Quirrell turned partway to look at Harry. "I serve my Master, the Dark Lord." A flicker of fear passed his face. "Sometimes, though, I find it hard to follow his instructions – he is a great wizard and I am weak. Ever since I let him down in the Gringotts robbery, he saw fit to stay closer."

"So you had him with you the entire time, even while you were teaching?" Harry prodded.

"Exactly," Quirrell said with a nod.

“Why do you follow him, anyway?”

“I met him while I was traveling around the world,” Quirrell said nostalgically. “A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it... Since then, I have served him faithfully.”

There! Harry had managed to wriggle one of his hands so his palm was grasping the ropes. He took several deep breaths as Quirrell turned back to the mirror. He was about to try wandless magic. “*Diffindo,*” Harry muttered. Harry was gratified to feel some of the rope holding him split. “*Diffindo,*” he repeated. “*Diffindo, diffindo, diffindo...*” he chanted, like a mantra. The ropes gave a little at each repetition, and finally Harry was out, though now he was very tired. Wandless magic was draining him badly in both magic and concentration.

Unfortunately for Harry, he had no chance to make good on his plan, as Quirrell said, “What does this mirror do? How does it work? Help me, Master!”

To Harry’s horror, a voice answered, and the voice seemed to come from Quirrell himself. “Use the boy... use the boy...”

Quirrell rounded on the boy. “Yes, Potter, come here... how did you get out of my ropes? No matter, just come here and look in the mirror. Tell me what you see.”

Could this get any more perfect? Harry asked himself as he stepped forward. He saw his reflection at first, a little pale, a little scared. But a moment later, the reflection smiled at him, putting its hand into its pocket and taking out a blood-red stone before putting it back and winking at Harry. Harry felt something drop into his pocket, and he had to stop his jaw from dropping. *I wasn’t expecting that. That must’ve taken some pretty damn advanced magic.*

“Well?” Quirrell asked impatiently. “What do you see?”

Harry quickly thought of a lie, and shoved the thought as truth into his false persona, just in case Quirrell could use Legilimency. "I see my family and friends around me," Harry said.

Quirrell cursed again. "Get out of the way," he snarled.

Harry was only too happy to do so. He could make a break for it, but should he? Quirrell's back was to him, and Harry had the perfect opportunity to just stab Quirrell through the heart or head and leave. *But what would be the good in that? Where is Voldemort anyway? I heard his voice earlier...*

Quirrell glanced back at Harry and then noticed the bulge in his pocket. "What's that, Potter?"

"A Remembrall," Harry quickly invented. "I'm not too good with remembering theory, so I thought it might help."

"Let me see," Quirrell demanded. When Harry hesitated, Quirrell pounced. "You lie! It is the Stone!"

"Let me speak to him... face-to-face..."

"Master, you are not strong enough!"

"I have strength enough for this..."

Harry watched in horrifying realization as Quirrell unwrapped his turban and slowly turned around. Where there should have been a back to Quirrell's head, there was a face, a terrible face. Not the worst, Harry would admit, but definitely enough to strike terror into the hearts of men. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils. Harry's scar almost exploded in pain when Voldemort's eyes connected with his own.

"Harry Potter..." Voldemort whispered. "See what I have become? Mere shadow and vapor... I have form only when I can share another's body... but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds... Unicorn blood has strengthened me these past weeks..."

Harry had heard enough. He drew his wand, ready for battle. *I can't run yet... I don't know if the others have escaped yet.* He jabbed his wand at Quirrell. “*Accio wand!*”

Quirrell's wand leapt out of his robes and Harry snatched it in midair, interrupting Voldemort's soliloquy. “You fool!” Voldemort hissed at Quirrell. “You let him take your wand!”

Quirrell snapped his fingers again, but Harry jumped out of the way of the ropes. “*Petrificus Totalus!*” he cried, sending two spells at Quirrell, both of which were dodged effortlessly. Harry decided to try another tactic. “*Glacius!*”

The Frost spell turned the floor to ice. Harry had some experience battling on ice, but he hoped that Quirrell did not. The plan was to cut off clean movement on Quirrell's part. Thankfully, Quirrell then fell on his ass, trying to get up.

“*Expelliarmus!*” The two Disarming Charms fired from Harry hit Quirrell with enough force to send him careening into a wall. Unfortunately for Harry, Quirrell got up with little more than a bruise, and now practically flew at Harry, jumping off the wall.

Apparently Quirrell had received some powers from having Voldemort in his head, because Harry didn't have the time to move. “KILL HIM!” Voldemort screamed, and Harry's scar felt like it was going to split his head open.

Quirrell started to choke Harry with his bare hands, but then he started screaming in pain, and sat back a little. Harry watched in horror-filled fascination as Quirrell's hands began to blister and burn. *What's going on?*

“JUST KILL HIM AND BE DONE WITH IT!” Voldemort screeched.

Quirrell almost managed to wrestle his wand from Harry's grasp before Harry's other hand lashed out and grabbed his head. All three present started screaming in pain – Harry from the mind-splitting pain from his scar, Quirrell from his skin starting to boil, and Voldemort from sharing Quirrell's pain.

Harry did his best to block out the pain using Occlumency, and managed to stay conscious throughout the ordeal. Finally, Voldemort abandoned Quirrell's body, which almost immediately crumbled and turned to dust as Voldemort's spirit flew through the roof.

Harry's scar finally stopped burning as Dumbledore rushed through the black flames. Harry groaned, and Dumbledore looked both pleased and relieved. "Harry!"

"Professor," Harry greeted from his position on the floor. "I'd try to sit up, but I have a splitting headache..." *He arrives just AFTER Voldemort's gone... Gah, what's his ultimate plan? I need to Scan him sometime, but it requires a few seconds to process, and I couldn't afford to before... maybe I'll have an opportunity now.*

"Harry, I must know, what happened?"

Harry quickly, despite the pain in his head, created a false memory of Quirrell outright attacking him after Voldemort called him a liar, and then of Harry killing Quirrell somehow through the pain of his scar. Then he explained just that.

Dumbledore was fooled. "I see..."

"That hasn't stopped him from ever coming back, has it?" Harry asked, slowly sitting up so as not to aggravate his headache.

"I'm afraid not. There are other ways for Voldemort to return, this was simply the best one available," Dumbledore confirmed.

"Just what happened with me and Quirrell? I mean, he couldn't touch me for some reason..." Harry was genuinely curious about this.

"I believe that the spell your mother placed on you has left a lingering protection in your blood. Her love kept something so evil as Voldemort from touching you."

That's nice and romantic, but utterly wrong. Yes, the lingering protection thing does make sense, but I bet it's from that Holy spell. Nothing so unholy as Voldemort could touch me. Interesting... that's why the undead avoided me on Terra.

“Why did Voldemort want to attack me as a baby anyways?”

Dumbledore sighed. “Alas, Harry, that is one of the questions I cannot answer yet. I shall not, of course, lie.”

“Is there a way to finish Voldemort off for good?”

“I believe so, but I have yet to locate it.” *True, as I do not yet know the locations of all the Horcruxes...*

“How did I get the Stone out of the mirror?”

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled. “Ah, I enchanted the mirror so only those who wanted the Stone, but not use it, could retrieve the Stone. It is one of my better ideas, and I mean no arrogance when I say that that is saying something.”

“Ah... Can we get out of here now?” *I wish Cure spells worked on headaches...* Harry woozily got to his feet, leaning against the wall for support.

“Fawkes!” Dumbledore called, and Harry watched in amazement as a beautiful regal-looking red and gold colored bird appeared in a flash of flame. “Harry, this is Fawkes, my phoenix familiar. Fawkes, this is Harry Potter.”

“Phoenix,” Harry whispered. “I am honored to meet you, Fawkes.”

Fawkes trilled back a short melody which, to Harry, meant a “Pleased to meet you too.”

“Fawkes, would you please take us back up?” Dumbledore asked, and the magnificent phoenix chirped an affirmative, extending its tail feathers for the two passengers to take hold. A few moments later, Harry and Dumbledore were directly outside the forbidden corridor, where Harry’s friends had apparently managed to return. Flitwick was still on the ground.

“Harry!” his four friends greeted. “You’re ok!”

“Mostly,” Harry corrected. “I’ve got a headache the size of a T-Rex...”

"What?" Dumbledore asked.

"A gigantic extinct creature that lived thousands of years ago. Muggles discovered remnants of them a while ago," Harry explained, hoping to cover up his mistake. "They called it Tyrannosaurus Rex, T-Rex for short." *Thank God Hermione brought me up to date on major Muggle discoveries...*

"Ah," Dumbledore said in understanding. "They named it 'Terrible Tyrant?' Interesting."

What's more interesting is that I've faced off with one and won, Harry mused. *Does that make me the Terrible Tyrant, since I've dethroned him? They run away anytime I see one nowadays...* Harry would have chuckled, except that then he would have had to explain. Not a good idea.

"Perhaps we should wake up Filius..." Dumbledore thought aloud, pointing his wand. "*Enervate.*"

Vaguely, Harry wondered if Dumbledore had said the incantation aloud to teach him. Flitwick woke up groggily before seeing Dumbledore. Then he was on his feet. "Albus! It was Quirrell! He's after the Stone! He got me while my back was turned!"

"Not to worry, Filius. Young Harry here has taken care of it," Dumbledore said with an affectionate smile.

Flitwick's eyes widened. "Harry went down after him, and won?"

"So it would seem," Dumbledore replied. "I shall explain at the next staff meeting. Harry, if you would please give me the Stone?" Harry did so silently. "Thank you. In the meantime, children, why don't you return to your dormitories?"

Everyone understood the dismissal. "We'll just walk Hermione to Gryffindor before we return to Slytherin," Harry said after a moment, taking Hermione's hand and giving his other friends a piercing look.

"Right," Theo said.

"Of course," Blaise agreed.

"We should be back in about fifteen minutes," Daphne said.

Dumbledore smiled gently, but that didn't fool Harry for a minute. "Be sure not to mention where you've been."

"Sure," Harry said right before they turned a corner. *Now that my headache's receded a bit, and I don't need to focus on fooling Dumbledore, now's the perfect opportunity!* "Hold up a minute," he said softly, before peeking around the corner again and aiming subtly with his right hand. "Scan!" A couple of moments later, Harry got the information.

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore

Headmaster of Hogwarts, Supreme Mugwump

Age: 157

Weight: 170

Weapon of Choice: Wand

Albus Dumbledore was a Ravenclaw while in Hogwarts himself, and graduated at the top of his class. Studying all branches of magic, including the infamous field of the Dark Arts, Dumbledore headed the battle against the Dark Lord Grindelwald over half a century ago. Grindelwald was finally killed by Dumbledore's hand.

No one has seen Dumbledore use a single Dark Arts spell or Unforgiveable Curse since that time, even when given permission in the war against the Dark Lord Voldemort. As a result, most of the magical population who stand against Voldemort revere him as the epitome of the Light Side, someone who has knowledge of the Dark Arts but the conviction to never use them.

The power has, however, corrupted Dumbledore. Though he still refuses to use the Dark Arts, his ambitions have grown much further than most could fathom. Using his status and fame, Dumbledore

subtly manipulates everyone around him for his final goal, which is still unknown.

Special Abilities:

Indeterminable

Threat Level: Indeterminable

Note: Special Abilities and Threat Level are unable to be determined due to aura of power interfering with Scan magic.

"Damn it," Harry muttered under his breath and he kept walking.

"What is it?"

"I can't get a proper Threat Level out of the Scan, and I really didn't learn anything new aside from that Dumbledore was a Ravenclaw as a student. You guys all right?" he asked.

"I'm fine," Hermione insisted. "I didn't get injured or knocked out," she said with a pointed glare at her friends, who had the grace to look away. Except for Daphne, that is.

"We didn't have a choice," Daphne said calmly. "You had to go on and face Quirrell."

"We're okay now," Theo added, rubbing his jaw. "Those chess pieces pack a punch, but the damage was only enough to knock us out."

"My injuries are only superficial," Blaise said calmly. *Does anything ever perturb him?* Harry wondered idly. "I will be healed within the week. And you, Harry?"

"Aside from the monstrous headache, I'm okay. Thankfully, the headache is already starting to go away. I think I just need some sleep."

"When did Dumbledore join you?" Blaise asked quickly.

"Just as we suspected, right after I beat Quirrell," Harry said bitterly.

“What exactly happened after we were knocked out?” Daphne asked. Hermione began the tale, explaining about the potions riddle, before turning to Harry, who then described the confrontation with Quirrell.

“The reason he couldn’t stand my touch was actually a spell my mother cast right as she died.” Harry quickly tried to sense anyone around, and finding none, leaned in to whisper. “It was Holy.”

“Holy?” Hermione whispered. “Isn’t that...”

“Yeah,” Harry confirmed. “One of the two most powerful spells I have.”

There was silence for a moment. “So... does that mean that anyone evil will get burned if they touch you?” Theo asked.

Harry thought for a moment. “I don’t think so. I’m pretty sure that this Holy was specialized to target Voldemort.”

None of them flinched at the name. Harry had long since taught them not to fear his name. “You can specialize Terran spells?” Blaise asked, curious.

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “Most of the work’s already been done in forming the spell. It’s all in how you use it. For instance, Blizzard could be used in a variety of ways. I could create a large shaft of ice and throw it at him, or I could make it a simple freezing spray.”

“Returning to the subject, what are we going to do about Voldemort?” Daphne asked bluntly. “You said he’s not gone for good.”

Harry nodded. “He’s achieved immortality somehow, but right now he’s just a spirit of sorts; he can’t do anything, but we can’t hurt him either.”

Hermione immediately understood. “So, we need to research methods of immortality?”

“No,” Harry said, and held up a hand to hold off any disagreements. “As much as I would like to, our only resource on such a subject is the Hogwarts library, and we cannot tip our hand yet. Dumbledore

has been deceiving us for a reason, and as we surmised, set up this entire situation with the Sorcerer's Stone as a test for me. I believe he knows how Voldemort may be destroyed, so instead of doing the hard research ourselves, I propose we keep doing what we're doing right now. I'll keep getting better at Legilimency, and when I'm good enough, I'll take the information from his mind."

"A promising plan," Blaise said slowly, "but it is quite likely Dumbledore practices Occlumency."

Harry frowned, not having thought of that. "Still, we cannot research immortality just yet. We need what time we have to get stronger, faster. Terra and Earth draw ever closer together, and monsters no one on Earth has ever seen shall appear. Some are magic-resistant or even magic-immune. It will be up to us to control any situations that come up."

"You're not serious, are you?" Theo asked. "How can five kids, four of whom aren't even trained, kill monsters from a different dimension?"

"I used to kill them on an everyday basis," Harry said with a shrug. "I've been doing that since the time I was eight." He looked at his friends. "I understand if you don't want to do this, but I cannot trust anyone else. Can you honestly say that anyone would listen to me, no matter who I look like, if I tell them that two worlds are starting to mix and that monsters are going to start appearing?" No one could really answer that. "That's what I thought. I can't exactly go back to Terra and tell anyone either, since the existence of other dimensions would definitely attract exploitation by the more wicked marketers. So, it's up to the five of us, for the time being. After everything's settled down, and Voldemort's gone for good, I suppose I'll bring in some teachers from Terra to create a new Garden."

Blaise nodded. "It appears we have little choice."

"It's not like we're committing our lives to this," Theo pointed out in a rare moment of seriousness. "And learning more than one style of fighting may be the thing that saves our lives someday."

Daphne looked speechless; Theo had actually sounded *mature*, and was being *logical* about something. She turned to Harry. "You're the

one more in tune to this kind of thing. Has hell frozen over? Has someone figured out how to make pigs fly of their own accord? Because Theo was just mature.”

Theo grinned. “Amazing, isn’t it?”

Daphne groaned. “Never mind, he’s himself again.”

Hermione giggled a little at their antics before her amusement died and she looked at Harry. “I’m not sure I’ll be able to,” she whispered.

“Why’s that?” Harry asked kindly.

Hermione took a deep breath. “I’m Muggleborn. My parents hardly know anything about magic, and that means that they’re not very attached to it. If they found out I’m participating in a violent merger of dimensions, and that I’m actually killing monsters... they’d do anything to keep me safe, and that means they’d keep me from returning to Hogwarts.”

Harry frowned. He had no parents to discourage that, but some of the people he’d met in his travels had been very strongly against violence of all kinds, to the point where they had banned all weapons in their territory. He didn’t understand them, but respected their ethics. *Violence is a necessary evil*, Harry thought sadly. *We need to be able to defend ourselves against those who would wage war against us.*

“Tell you what,” Harry said after a moment. “Your parents wouldn’t disagree with me teaching you self-defense, right?” Hermione nodded. “Then I’ll teach you just as I would the others. You don’t need to worry about the monsters yet anyway, since it should take another year or so for them to start appearing.” *I hope*, Harry added mentally.

The following night, Harry took his friends to the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest, following his magic sense to where he knew Cerberus awaited. There, Cerberus raised three eyebrows – one per dog head – at Harry.

“I thought you were coming alone,” it growled.

“If you join me, you join my companions as well,” Harry said flatly.

Cerberus nodded his three heads. "Very well. You have proven yourselves worthy in the tests leading to the Stone. Who shall I join?"

Theodore stepped forward, for once with a solemn expression. "Me."

Cerberus's three heads roared as he began to dissolve. A few seconds later, all that was left was a round black stone, with an engraving of Cerberus. Theodore picked it up. "Um, what am I supposed to do with this now? Am I supposed to have a weird-looking black stone in my hand?"

"Concentrate on absorbing it," Harry answered.

Theo shrugged and did so, and the jewel entered his palm. His eyes widened. "Whoa, I can hear him!"

"Yeah, that's normal," Harry told him. "Just think *at* him to communicate."

"Gotcha! So, any cool powers I get from it?"

"You're stronger magically now," Harry confirmed, "and once you get some Terran spells, Cerberus will help you enhance your strength and make you immune to some elemental magic."

"Cool!"

The rest of Harry's time at Hogwarts seemed like a blur; the Slytherins won the Quidditch Cup yet again, though it was close this time – apparently Brian Jones, the Gryffindor Seeker, had been working overtime in his training and with the Chasers had almost made up for their point loss to Slytherin.

At the End of the Year Feast, Gryffindor had managed to win, much to Harry's displeasure. He had hoped that saving the Sorcerer's Stone would have been worth some points, as they were just behind Gryffindor, but alas, it was not to be.

Since there were no exams to study for anymore, Harry had taken to pushing his friends to their limits in their physical training. He wanted them to improve as much as they could during what time they had left,

since their progress during summer would be limited at best without someone to guide and push them to their extremes. But that wasn't all Harry was worried about.

Harry was returning to the Dursleys at the end of term. The very thought of it almost made Harry want to scream, but instead left him shaking in cold rage. The problem was simply that Harry couldn't outright leave them, because that would be against the plan he and his friends had decided on – they would play along with Dumbledore's manipulations, but work in secret.

The result was that Harry was between a rock and a hard place. The Dursleys would quite likely be even nastier than before after they had seemingly gotten rid of Harry for good, which meant they'd have no mercy towards an eleven-year-old. To top it all off, Harry couldn't cast magic during the holidays. True, Harry could bluff and threaten them with magic, but a bluff could only last so long without being tested. Harry knew this from experience. Nevertheless, Harry was willing to make use of the bluff as long as he could.

On the train to Platform Nine and Three Quarters, Harry and his friends shared a compartment. No one commented on the heavy atmosphere that seemed to emanate from the brooding lightning-scarred raven-haired boy, knowing that he had equally heavy things on his mind. He had explained his concerns to his friends, and extracted promises from each of them to write him and keep up their training.

At Platform Nine and Three Quarters, Harry said his goodbyes and reluctantly made his way to the large forms of Vernon and Dudley Dursley, who stood by the skin-and-bones version of Petunia. "Come on boy, get in the car," Vernon ordered with no small amount of loathing. "We don't have all day."

Harry narrowed his eyes hatefully, but did as he was told. It was only on the way back to Number Four Privet Drive that he spoke his mind. "Uncle Vernon, I have a deal for you."

Vernon looked at him in the rearview mirror and noticed as Dudley shoved him again, Potter's eyes kept narrowing. Those eyes made him nervous; they were cold and calculating, and Vernon was

suddenly reminded of some of the more die-hard policemen, the ones who had killed. Still, it would be a cold day in hell when Vernon was intimidated by an eleven-year-old brat who'd been missing for the past six years. "I'm listening," he growled.

"Here is the situation as I see it. You hate me. I hate you. We both hate the fact that we have to live together for the summer, so, naturally, we want to make each other's lives hell. What I propose is that we leave each other alone. You don't force any chores on me, and I don't use any of my magic on you," Harry stated coldly.

Vernon scoffed. *He's only finished his first year of schooling! What can he do?* He voiced his thoughts aloud, planning on tripping up the boy.

Harry's eyes flashed. "I can do quite a bit, *Uncle Vernon*," Harry informed his uncle. "The question is: do you want to risk your wife and son to my magic?" Harry questioned, hating himself for even asking that. He disliked anyone who got their way by threatening loved ones, and he felt like a hypocrite. Nevertheless, it was necessary to make the bluff last as long as possible.

The pig in a wig – Dudley – scooted as far away from Harry as he could, which wasn't very far, considering that he was approaching the size of a baby killer whale. Petunia looked horrified, and turned to her husband, her eyes pleading. Vernon didn't have to look at her to realize his only course of action. "Fine," he bit out before thinking about just what he had just agreed to. *All he asked for was for us to leave him alone, and he'll do the same. No chores in exchange for the safety of my family. I hate him! I hate his freakish ways, but he has no sense of equal exchange. I can use that.*

Harry, on the other hand, was pleased. *The bluff worked! And hopefully I was scary and menacing enough for them not to test it this summer. Maybe now I can continue my training...*

It was with these thoughts that Harry returned to his hell on Earth, Number Four Privet Drive.

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Well, that was the last chapter of this book. Hope you all enjoyed it! I'm already working on the next installment, "Worldly Secrets" so please stay tuned for that! I'm taking 2 weeks to properly get everything straight, in addition to focusing on my college studies. Sorry, but it's just something that has to be done.

Read and Review, please! Hope I made it all convincing.

Hey all, this is NeoRyu777! This is just a notice that the first chapter of the sequel is up and online!

Thank you, everyone, for reading "A World of Difference" and I hope to be reading your reviews later!

... ok, enough exclamation. Trust me, this first chapter of "Worldly Secrets" will hit you, hard. Introducing: the rest of the Weasley family, Gilderoy Lockhart, Lucius Malfoy, among others. It goes all the way from Harry Potter at the Dursleys to the Sorting at Hogwarts, so it's a bit of a long chapter. Read and Review!